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Vol. I

The Wolf of the Waves

A TALE OF THE PIRATES OF OLD.

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG.



“Here comes another!” cried Jack. “Look out!” The pirate sent in a broadside, one of which struck the bowsprit of the privateer, and injured it badly.

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The Wolf of the Waves.

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG,

Author of "King Morgan, the Terror of the Seas," "Tiger Ted," "Invincible Bill," "Arctic Phil, the Bear Slayer of the Northern Seas," Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE "VULTURE" SEEKS ITS PREY—THE PIRATE AND HIS VICTIM.

BOOM! boom!

Suddenly the sound came rolling over the waters of the Mediterranean.

The unmistakable sound of heavy guns.

Leaning over the bulwarks of the *Vulture*, and straining his eyes through the telescope to catch a sign of any vessel in the cold gray of the dawn, Jack Gale could see nothing but the crest of the white-waved billows, but he could plainly hear the roar of artillery.

Jack was a fine, well-built fellow of about sixteen, and his eyes lit up with more than usual brightness as he turned to a lad about his own age, who stood beside him.

"I am sure I am not mistaken, Tom," he said; "that's the roar of guns! We shall have a chance at last, I hope. I am sick of this continual dodging about after nothing, and long for a good brush with the French. There they go again. Tom, how I wish I could see them."

"It ain't likely you'll see 'em just yet, Master Jack," said the lad addressed. "There's a mist on the sea for all the world like what used to come up over dad's turnip fields. That'll be clean gone soon, and then we'll see 'em, and no mistake."

"How goes it, Mr. Gale?" cried Harry Breezly, the first "luff," as he sauntered up. "Do you make out anything?"

"Nothing, sir," replied Jack. "I can hear the guns plainly, as I've heard them for some time, but I can't see the ghost of a ship. Can I go aloft, sir?"

"Why, yes," said Lieutenant Breezly, "perhaps you'd better. You are young, and old Ben Brace is up aloft. He's not very well off for top-lights now, I'm afraid, though he's such a brave old boy in a scrimmage. Up ye go, Jack."

"Ay, ay, sir," cried our hero. And in another moment he was scrambling up the rigging with the agility of a monkey.

Once up aloft by the side of old Ben Brace, Jack strained his eyes eagerly in the direction of the sounds which had roused such enthusiasm in his heart.

The *Vulture* went plunging on like a racehorse, and Jack, as he observed its splendid progress through the water, felt an elation such as hitherto had been a stranger to him.

He had always loved the sea, and at this moment he experienced to the full the fact that his dearest wish was granted at last.

Brought up in a country place by his father, Captain Gale, whose wounds precluded him from further active service, he had always instilled into him a reverence for the mighty ocean; and when Captain Hollyoak, an old friend of the retired officer, obtained command of the *Vulture*, Jack was delighted at the offer of a berth as middy on board of her.

The *Vulture* was a French vessel, the *Normandie*, which had been taken by Captain Hollyoak during the war which was then being waged between England and France.

She had been repaired and refitted.

Letters of marque were granted to her captor, and she had sailed from Portsmouth on a voyage of adventure.

When Jack left Brierly Lodge, where he had spent so many happy years, he was not alone.

The tales of adventure and daring which he had heard from his father he had poured into the willing ears of another, and that other was

Tom Meadows, the son of Farmer Meadows, and his foster-brother.

For Jack's mother had died at his birth, and good-tempered buxom Mrs. Meadows had taken the sea captain's only child and nursed it for him as her own.

Suddenly Jack uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Ah, Ben," he cried, addressing the old sailor by his side, "there they are! Right away there! Right ahead on the line of the horizon. Aren't they blazing away, too?"

Without waiting for a reply from the old tar, who with a sniff and a grunt screwed his eyes, and glued his right one to his long telescope in an endeavor to make out something, Jack came plunging hand-over-hand, and dropped just in front of the first "luff" and the captain.

"I've seen them! They're right ahead, sir!" he puffed eagerly. "And they're firing away like mad, sir!"

A smile passed over the captain's face. He was a brave man, and admired courage in others.

"You seem very glad, Mr. Gale," he said. "I suppose you're hoping there'll be a fight for us!"

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, with an eager flush. "We've been doing nothing for such a time that I shall be glad of a brush with the French. Besides, sir, I can't forgive them the fact of our having to make all sail away from those two frigates because they were too heavy for us. I want to see the tables turned."

"So they shall be, my lad," said the captain. "But let me warn you not to be too rash. Don't be too cautious in the first place and give your enemy time to overhaul ye, but don't be too headlong in the second place, but keep your weather eye open and your guns ready at the same time."

"Thank you, sir," cried Jack. "I'll take your advice. Shall I keep the lookout, sir?"

"Yes, at the bows, my brave lad. Ben Brace can remain aloft," said the captain; and walking aft, he began to rapidly issue his orders.

In an instant all hands were busy, and in a wondrously short space of time the *Vulture* began to forge ahead more swiftly than ever under a tremendous spread of canvas.

It skimmed over the white-crested waves like some huge sea-bird, and it was not long before Jack saw in the distance, right ahead, two vessels, distinct now in the glorious splendor of the risen sun.

The sky now was one glow of golden glory, and a long belt of light quivered along the billows.

It was easy to see that the two ships were engaged in a deadly conflict, but they were many miles ahead, and the crew of the *Vulture* knew that a long time must ensue before they would be able to make out who the combatants were.

"We're going at a splendid pace, Master Jack," said Tom Meadows, as he stood near his foster-brother, eagerly scanning the horizon.

"Yes, I know the *Vulture's* doing her best; every stitch of canvas is spread," said Jack; "but yet I can't help feeling impatient. I don't know why, but I've a presentiment that something very strange affecting me is about to happen."

Tom Meadows laughed.

"Ah, Master Jack," he cried, "you were always a-saying that; but I don't think anything ever turned up special except when you prophesied you'd get a thwacking for stealing old Burnside's apples, and you got it."

"Never mind that, Tom," said Jack, with a smile; "we're not talking about apples now; we're in for sterner work than that. I'm not nervous nor anything of that kind, but I feel as if something, good or bad, is going to turn up for me."

Jack was not superstitious in any way.

He only experienced a sensation which hundreds and thousands of people have had before, and which is utterly unaccountable.

"Well, I hope it is going to be something good, Master Jack," said Tom; "but see, the fight's over, the big ship's sheering off, and is giving a shot at parting. I wonder whether it's an English ship that's won?"

That was a thought shared by every one on board.

As the *Vulture* plowed her way through the dancing waves every eye was strained in the direction of the two vessels.

Scarcely a word was spoken.

Eagerness overcame even the desire to express thought.

Jack and Tom now and then exchanged a few sentences; but as they neared the ship, which had been left astern by the one which was spreading her canvas to the freshening wind, their eagerness became almost painful.

Two things they saw at once.

In the first place, it was a British vessel, and in the second place, it was lying helpless, and at the mercy of the heavy wind that blew.

The masts were broken, and lay with their wrecks of rope and canvas on the deck or over the sides.

There seemed no sign of life aboard anywhere, and the hull lay deep down in the sea, as if it was water-logged, or was slowly settling.

In the second place, the flag that fluttered torn and ragged from the mast was English.

With a stern face the captain of the *Vulture* gave orders to bear up alongside.

Then, after he had taken one good look at the enemy, who was scudding away as fast as her crowded canvas and a good breeze could carry her, he turned toward the "first luff."

"That does not look like a French craft, Mr. Breezly," he said; "she's more like one of these lubberly Italian pirates. We must overhaul this vessel, and then after her. Give orders for the deck to be cleared for action; let everything be taut and trim, and we'll soon overtake the vagabond. I feel certain there's been murder—piracy yonder."

As Jack Gale glanced at the deserted ship, the captain's words seemed truly to carry the impress of truth with them.

Everything connected with the vessel they were approaching seemed to speak of death.

The flapping canvas, the dead silence, the dreary roll of the sea, the that hovered overhead, all spoke of the presence of the enemy.

However, they were not to be deterred by doubts and fears were clear.

With breathless anxiety the crew of the *Vulture* at length came alongside, and the grappling irons having been thrown, the stranger, Captain Hollyoak and his body of men made their way on deck.

They advanced with extreme caution.

Experience had taught the captain that there might be some ruse, some treachery afloat, and so it was with care and watchfulness that they began to overhaul the vessel.

It wanted but a few moments to tell them what terrible work had been there.

Everywhere on the deck lay the bodies of dead men, their stiffened hands still grasping their swords; their brows knit, and their teeth set in passionate anger.

Blood still ran on the deck—the sunlight glistened on pools of it.

Below all was the same; blood and dead men, ransacked boxes, furniture hacked and hewn willfully, or in the struggle—everywhere ruin, wreck and desolation.

Both men and women had fallen victims to the terrible ruffians, whoever they might be, who had attacked the ship; and mothers were found still clasping to their cold breasts the stiffened forms of murdered infants.

"Not a sign of anything living here, Mr. Breezly," said Captain Hollyoak. "We must away in chase of these villains. We need not stop to bury these people; the hold is half full of water now, and she seems settling quickly."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Breezly; "our duty is not to the dead, but to the living. We must try and rid the seas of such vermin as these."

At this moment there was a joyful cry from Jack.

"Quick! this way, Captain Hollyoak," he cried.

The captain and Lieutenant Breezly at once hastened in the direction indicated by the voice, and found Jack and Tom, with some others, attending as best they could to the wants of a young man who was in a fainting condition.

He was about five-and-twenty years of age, handsome and athletic, and was evidently belonging to the upper ranks of society.

He was wounded in the left arm and chest, and was now faint with loss of blood.

A few minutes sufficed for Captain Hollyoak to learn his story of the ship that was so wrecked.

The *Arianthe* was an English merchantman, bound for the East, and the vessel which had attacked them was the *Wolf of the Waves*, a Genoese pirate.

They had come upon the unsuspecting crew of the *Arianthe* in the night.

Either there was treachery on board, or bad watch had been kept, for the pirate boats had been suffered to come alongside unchallenged, and the men to creep on deck unnoticed and unopposed.

Then a terrible scene began.

Men and women were massacred without mercy; the watch on deck had already been killed; the place was ransacked; the wine and spirits drank, with fearful oaths, amid the groans of the dying and the vengeful exclamations of the survivors.

The man—who was telling the story—had on board his wife, to whom he had been married only three months, and her sister, a lovely girl of fifteen.

They, too, would have been sacrificed by the men, who seemed mad with eagerness for blood-letting, but the pirate, a young but desperate villain, was at once struck by the beauty of the bride.

"Come, come, Bernardo," he cried to his pirate lieutenant, "this English flower is too lovely to be crushed so early. Call off the men; I charge you with her safety till the hour we reach the shores of Italy."

"I will, capitano," replied his lieutenant, whose eyes had already taken in all the beauties of the young wife, in spite of her desperate sorrow and anger, and at a word from him two of the brawny ruffians, who were less intoxicated with spirits and murder than the rest, seized her and bore her away.

"And this pretty girl, her sister?" said Bernardo.

The young girl had fainted when she had seen her sister carried off towards the pirate vessel, and now lay stretched senseless on the couch in the cabin.

The pirate gave her one glance.

"Yes," he said, "take her away, also. She may be useful in finding me favor in the eyes of her sister, the beautiful English woman."

And so the young girl was borne off also to the cabin of the Italian pirate.

During all this time the battle was raging with the intensest fury.

The young husband fought like a demon; though wounded, he continued the conflict long after he had seen those whom he loved carried off by merciless hands; and when he struck down a huge pirate who was pressing him hard, together with two others, he was the only living being left on board.

He could easily have been disposed of now. But a diabolical idea entered the mind of the fierce pirate captain, Paolo Leoni.

"Stay!" he cried; "slay him not. I have a better fate in store for him—a fate which will

give him time to reflect upon the number of my brave men he has succeeded in sending to Hades this day, and to think of my happiness with his newly-made bride."

He whispered a few words to his men.

The enraged husband was defending himself with terrific energy, and dealing blows right and left, when he was tripped up from behind, and fell face foremost on the deck.

In an instant he was secured.

Then with ruthless brutality he was bound to the mast; food and drink were placed within his sight, but far out of reach; and a small hole having been bored in the side of the vessel, he was left alone to his terrible fate.

Such was the story which the young Englishman, Ernest Harden, told to the captain of the *Vulture* and his English sailors, who listened in horror and indignation to his words.

"And you can swear to this villain and his ship?" said Captain Hollyoak.

"Yes; to him, to his ship, and to his villainous lieutenant," said Ernest Harden. "I should know their faces anywhere."

"Then, now that you are a little recovered, come on board the *Vulture* with me, and I warrant ye we'll soon overhaul the vagabonds. Pirates shall see what a few British tars can do against a set of thieving, murderous rascals. Hang me if I'm not anxious to be at 'em!"

The good old-fashioned sea-captain kept muttering invectives against the pirates, and consigning them verbally to swift perdition, until they were on board the *Vulture*.

When all were safely on deck, a shot was fired into the *Arianthe* below water-mark, as it was unsafe to leave her, water-logged as she was, to come into collision perhaps with a vessel in the night; and then all sail was spread again, and away the *Vulture* darted over the bounding waves on her errand of vengeance.

The form of the pirate-ship was distinctly to be seen in the distance, making apparently for the Italian coast.

"Mr. Harden," said the captain, as they saw the *Arianthe* shiver, roll heavily, and then plunge headlong beneath the deep blue waves, "I swear to avenge your wrongs. The *Vulture* is an English privateer fitted out to worry the French mercantile marine—not to chase pirates. But I'm going to do it, and I'll be bound there's not a man aboard this craft that'll complain. We'll give him such a trouncing, though we do only carry four guns, as he never had in his life."

Jack Gale listened intently, and with eager anticipation, to the words of the captain.

"Tom," he said, turning to his foster-brother, as the skipper finished speaking, "didn't I tell you that something was going to happen? You see I was right. First, we find the disabled *Arianthe*, with its freight of death and horror, and now we are on the track of a pirate, to save a beautiful lady and her sister."

Tom laughed.

"Yes," he cried; "and who knows? The young lady may fall in love with you when you have saved her life, and marry you after going through all manner of adventures, just as you used to tell me when we sat under the elder tree in father's garden."

Brave, simple-hearted English lads!

They were looking forward eagerly to their life of adventure.

But they little knew the extent of the perils and disasters towards which they were drifting as they left behind them the wreck of the *Arianthe*—sunk in its ocean grave; and the *Vulture* plunged madly on, under press of canvas, on her path of vengeance.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHASE.

As Captain Hollyoak had said, the *Vulture* was not intended for the service on which his courage and manliness of heart had made him volunteer.

She was lightly built, and had been intended by the French to punish the English merchant vessels.

She was swift as a seagull, light as a cork, and as buoyant; "safe," as her captain said, "as a lifeboat;" and just the sort of ship to run down a heavily laden prize, and cripple her with her long guns at a distance.

Her captain had full confidence in the success of his adventure.

His crew consisted of picked, tried men, who had received a baptism of fire and sword.

Every one of them was burning now with indignation at the scene they had just witnessed, and eager to avenge the sufferings of their countrymen.

Despite, therefore, the fact that the *Vulture* only carried four light carronades, the captain felt

quite assured of victory, even though his enemy might be possessed of far heavier metal.

She had the advantage over her adversary in speed, at any rate.

This could be seen at once.

Viewing the pirate through his telescope, Jack could see that she had every rag set, and was laboring on heavily, while the *Vulture* skimmed lightly over the dancing waves like her namesake swooping after her prey.

"We're overhauling her, hand over hand, sir," said our hero to the captain, as he stood beside him on the fore-castle. "What a lovely vessel the *Vulture* is! How proud I am to belong to her crew."

"I am right glad you are, my lad," returned the captain. "There's nothing better for the safety of a vessel than the fact of officers and men having faith in her."

Gradually, not quickly, but perceptibly, the distance between the two vessels diminished.

With wildly-beating heart, Jack saw the pirate vessel grow gradually bigger and bigger, until he could make her out to be a large schooner-rigged craft with twelve guns, capable of containing a crew twice as numerous as that on board the *Vulture*.

"She'll be a hard nut to crack, Master Jack," said Tom Meadows; "a big un and no mistake. I'm not much of a sailor yet, and haven't been in a scrimmage, but it strikes me we've got all our work to do."

"Never mind, Tom," said Jack, "the *Vulture's* well up to the business. Everything's taut and trim, and ready for action. And look at the men! They look like so many bulldogs only waiting to be unmuzzled and let loose! No wonder, when they think of the horrors they have just seen and the innocent victims now aboard the pirate."

"Aye, that would stir the blood of any one who had a bit of manliness left in him," said a deep, stern voice near them; and turning, they saw standing against the bulwarks the form of Ernest Harden.

He was very pale; statuesque indeed was the contour of his handsome face.

His arms were folded, and stern was the look in his dark hazel eyes as he gazed with a kind of painful longing at the vessel they were pursuing—that vessel which contained all that was dear to him in the world.

What a tumult was raging in his heart!

At that moment the softer passion was overwhelmed—mercy was a thing unknown to him; he only longed to grapple with the villain who had borne away from him his young and lovely bride into scenes and to a fate which he shuddered even to contemplate.

His eyes seemed to burn as they gazed, and the words appeared to come with an effort from his white, set lips.

"You are right, sir," said Jack, "but your impatience will soon be satisfied. The *Vulture* is on her mettle, as you see, and is rapidly lessening the distance between herself and that floating nest of criminals."

"Aye, she is; but not swift enough for me," said Harden, clenching his hands nervously and vengefully together. "See yonder, there is a danger for us which you do not notice."

Jack eagerly scanned the horizon.

But he saw nothing, save some far-away ghost-like ships.

"I see nothing threatening," he said. "Tell me—what is it you mean?"

"Right ahead," said Ernest Harden, in the cold, calm tones of suppressed excitement, "right ahead the pirate is a long, low, dark line. That is the coast of Italy. Once there—once under the guns of one of the fortresses, the villains are safe."

Jack's face changed.

"I had not thought of that, sir," he said. "I had hoped we should catch them before they could near shore."

"I fear there is no chance," said Harden, with a sigh, "unless, indeed, our cannonade can bring her to when we get within gunshot. I only hope we shall. My very soul seems to hang on that hope—the blissful hope of being soon able to grapple with that accursed pirate monster, and hurl him headlong to perdition!"

As he spoke he clenched his hands and raised them aloft, and a flush of crimson inundated his features, as if he already was clutching his enemy, and flinging him headlong into the rolling waves.

"Not much hope for the pirate-captain if he gets hold of him," whispered Tom Meadows. "He'll double him up like a bit of pasteboard."

"You are right," said Jack; "it is only necessary for all the men to be in the same mind as he, and they could tear the ship to pieces with their hands."

The ships now were soon within gunshot, and

without waiting even to challenge the pirate, the *Vulture's* bow gun was fired.

In an instant the famous black flag was run up, with the well-known emblem—the death's head and crossbones—emblazoned on it.

Then a roar proceeded from the vessel's side, and a shot from a heavy gun came dancing over the waves.

"Hurrah! hurrah!"

A wild shout broke from the lips of the crew of the *Vulture*.

They had won the race, and the action had begun.

But, despite her heavier metal and greater size, the pirate evidently did not intend to show fight.

The land was now near, and for some reason or another Paolo Leoni, the pirate, prepared making for shore to await the attack of his little enemy.

"The cowards mean to run for it," cried Captain Hollyoak. "Give it 'em, Mr. Breezly!"

The *Vulture* had tacked, so as to present one of her broadsides to the enemy, and the gun which Lieutenant Breezly served gave tongue at once.

And with a vengeance, too.

Boom!

The well-aimed shot went high above the water as the *Vulture* rose on the crest of a wave, and striking the mast on which flaunted the black flag with its ghastly emblem, brought it down with a run.

"Hurrah!"

A loud cheer again arose from the deck of the *Vulture*, while a dull roar of rage, borne to them on the breeze, was followed by a broadside from the pirate.

The shots whistled perilously near, one going clear across the deck, and carrying away some ropes.

But the pirate did not stop to see what damage he had done.

Evidently all his efforts were directed towards reaching land as swiftly as possible, and veering round so as to leave the *Vulture* on another tack, the *Wolf of the Waves* plunged onward towards land.

The English privateer, however, was manned by a crew well disciplined, and thoroughly efficient in all the arts of seamanship, and, consequently, after another shot had leaped gayly over the waves and passed clean through the main-sail, she was brought round to the wind once more, and went skipping, leaping, plowing her way through the waves.

Then the gun at her bow spoke again, this time fired by Jack.

It was with intense anxiety that all watched this shot.

None more anxiously than Jack himself.

It was his first attempt of the kind, and, with a longing to distinguish himself, his heart beat with an eagerness which none would have dreamed of from his calm and quiet demeanor.

Captain Hollyoak stood anxious also, though calm and confident.

There was the usual roar and flash, the shot sped swiftly, just touching the crest of a wave, and then crashing into one of the masts, and sending a wreck of canvas and timber over the ship's side.

Again a loud "hurrah" arose from the *Vultures* as the ship seemed, from the sudden stoppage of the other vessel, to leap forward with more eager speed than ever.

Her prey seemed now truly in her grasp.

Ernest Harden stood with his hand upon the hilt of his sword, a flush of pleasure on his face, a smile of triumph on his well-curved lip.

It was a moment of tremendous excitement for all.

The men leaned over the bulwarks, measuring with their eyes, as it were, the distance between their craft and the enemy.

But for Jack it was a time of supreme delight.

On the voyage he had, of course, abundance of practice, but this was the first shot he had attempted at a foe in action.

"You've begun well," said Tom, in rapture. "Why, that's the finest shot I ever saw fired."

"Here comes another," cried Jack; "look out!"

He was right.

In reply to the shot which had so astonished the pirates, and glorified the hearts of the *Vultures*, the former sent in a broadside, most of the shots of which were ill directed, but one of which struck the bowsprit of the privateer, and injured it badly.

"The deuce fly away with the lubbers!" cried the captain. "Quick, you *Vultures*, there; clear away that lumber, and rig up a new sprit."

It was indeed enough to cause the captain to indulge in even more than the oaths he gave vent to, for a moment before the disaster the privateer seemed to have it all his own way.

The disabled pirate was being rapidly overhauled, while now the *Vulture* swinging round to the wind, lost her points and her headway, and the *Wolf of the Waves* quickly relieved of her wreckage, began again to forge ahead.

They were quite close now to the Italian coast—close enough to see the people on the beach.

A big fort frowned on one side; a curving line of sand and pebble formed a miniature bay; a little village was perched on an eminence just above.

"Confound my bad luck, Mr. Breezly!" cried the captain, speaking in a voice which seemed to imply that the first luff was to blame. "Here was I thinking that we should blow this lubberly pirate out o' the water, and she's rushing right under the guns of the fort. See now."

And he pointed in anger and surprise in the direction of the vessel.

Down again came the black flag, up ran the Italian ensign.

In an instant there was a roar of guns from the land battery.

The pirate had signaled that he was in distress—chased by an enemy, and the commander of the fort had come to his assistance.

"What can this mean?" exclaimed Captain Hollyoak, turning to Lieutenant Breezly and Ernest Harden, who stood beside him. "There must be something deuced wrong on board, or else we are being led into a trap, or this fellow would not run for protection to the fort from a vessel half his size. Ease her, Mr. Breezly, or we shall be blown out of the water."

The bowsprit had by this time been replaced by a new one, and the sails were all taut and trim again.

But it was quite evident that for the present all was over with the pursuit.

To go on much further would be to rush madly within gun-shot of the fort, and to willfully jeopardize the lives of the *Vulture's* crew for nothing.

"What are you going to do, sir?" said Jack, addressing the captain. "May I give them another shot?"

"No, not now," said the captain; "we must consider what is best to be done."

"Consider!" exclaimed Ernest Harden, excitedly. "What time is there to consider when my wife and her sister are in the power of this miscreant? Something must be done, and that quickly."

"Right," said Captain Hollyoak; "something must be done. I know how terrible must be your anxiety, and I feel for you; but rashness is worse than anything. Try and be patient. Remember I have sworn to save those you love or avenge them. I am a British sailor, and I shall not break my oath."

Ernest Harden turned with pale face and features expressive of intense emotion, and grasped the captain by the hand.

"Pray bear with me," he said; "my sorrow and my anger are almost more than I can bear."

"Certainly, I can bear with you, and feel for you," said the captain.

All this time our hero Jack had been on the lookout.

"Excuse me, sir," he said; "may I make a suggestion, and offer to do a service at the same time?"

"Of course, Mr. Gale."

"Well, sir," continued Jack, "you see that point yonder where the trees come down almost to the water's edge?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, these pirates will be sure to go ashore this evening, and as we're not likely to get in under the guns of the fort, I suggest that we land yonder, and enter the village, and see how things are. If you give me a well-armed boat's crew I guarantee to follow any of the rascals I see, and discover their haunts."

"And I will go with you," cried Ernest Harden.

"Yes, sir, if you think you can restrain yourself," said Jack.

"By Neptune!" said Captain Hollyoak. "You shall have your way, Jack Gale. It will be a perilous adventure, but you know that already, and I am not the one to stay a lad when he is on the brink of doing a brave action. You shall have the long-boat, and Ben Brace and Tom Meadows shall be among your crew. There is nothing like having those with you whom you know and trust. Mr. Ernest Harden shall also be of the party, but he must, as you have suggested, promise to be quiet."

"I will promise anything, and on my honor I will perform it," cried Harden.

Poor fellow! he was beside himself with eagerness.

So it was arranged as Jack desired it.

The evening now was fast closing in.

The *Wolf of the Waves* had nestled herself snugly under the wing of the Italian fort; and all

was eagerness on board the *Vulture* as it lay at anchor just beyond gunshot.

As soon as darkness came on, all preparations having been made, the boat was lowered, and Jack, with Ernest Harden and his crew of ten picked seamen, entered it.

A few last words from Captain Hollyoak, "Remember my words, lad, and act up to 'em," and they were off, pulling swiftly over the water with muffled oars.

They had the advantage of a dark night, so dark that if it had not been for the lights in the village they would not have been able to steer towards the point they wished to reach.

But presently their boat grazed against the sands, and Ben Brace, leaping out, held it steadily for the others.

In a few minutes more they were all ashore, and the boat secure.

"Now, lads, ready with your weapons," said Jack, "and away."

And he was just about to march in the direction of the hamlet, when at the side of the road a sudden light glowed out, and Ernest, springing forward, saw a number of men gathered round a fire which they had just been replenishing.

"Ha!" he cried, gaspingly, as he seized Jack's arm, "and I have sworn to keep calm. See, see, Jack Gale, that man who stands there with the light of the fire flickering on his swarthy face—that is Paolo Leoni, the pirate."

"Hush, steady!" cried Jack. "We may catch him now like a rat in a trap if we are only calm. *Vultures*, follow me, the pirates are before us!"

CHAPTER III.

THE PIRATE COUNCIL—THE MYSTERIOUS MONK—ON THE TRACK OF THE ASSASSINS.

THERE was great danger to Jack Gale and his friends.

Their peril lay in the fact of their being suddenly discovered by Leoni and his men.

So with noiseless feet they crept nearer to the fire, round which the pirates were assembled, and Jack, concealed behind the trunk of a huge tree, listened with eagerness to every word that fell from the lips of the dark-faced pirate.

By Jack's side stood Ernest Harden, keeping himself composed by a violent effort, though his heart beat fiercely for revenge as he saw his enemy, and wondered what was the fate of his beloved ones.

Jack, in fact, had to hold his hand in order to admonish him every moment, for fear he should rush forward to strike the bloodthirsty villain to the earth.

"Well, comrades," said Leoni, "I think we may congratulate ourselves on the success of today. We have captured bags of gold enough to pay for a long spell on shore. I have gained two beautiful captives for myself. Your share in the booty is a splendid one. A fifth of the treasure is to be divided among the men."

A suppressed cheer arose from the latter, but a dark cloud rested on the face of the lieutenant, Bernardo.

He too had seen how wondrously fair was the face of Ernest Harden's wife, and his heart was bursting with envy to think that his captain would possess so fair a prize.

"Where are we going now?" asked he. "Are we to proceed to sea, or are we going up the mountains to the retreat of our friend, Rinaldo?"

"I and ten men are going up the mountains to the village of Spezzia," said Leoni, "whither my fellows have carried the English girls; that is to say, we shall start to-night after we have been to Spadoni's drinking house. You, Bernardo, I wish to stand out to sea at dawn, and having divided the gold among the crew, sail for Reggio. There I will join you in a week. By that time my gallant fellows will have spent all their money, and will be glad of another cruise."

"You give me but little chance of enjoyment, captain, after our hard fight," he said. "I would rather have accompanied you to Spezzia, and —"

Leoni, with one of his fiercest looks, raised his hand.

"Nay, Bernardo," he cried; "I must have no denial. Where will the discipline of the *Wolf of the Waves* be if you begin by disputing commands? It is imperative that I should go to Spezzia, and to whom then could I give the command of my vessel? Who could guide her safely through her enemies? Remember that there is an English ship in the offing, and will be watching for us. It will not do to fight her. You must show her a clean pair of heels; and who but you, my Bernardo, can do so?"

The two men eyed one another steadfastly for an instant.

Both knew the other's secret; that both loved the same woman.

Bernardo knew that, for the moment, he was powerless.

Leoni was a pirate of old, and he would have thought nothing of drawing his pistol and shooting Bernardo dead on the spot.

So the lieutenant gave in for the time being, but deadly thoughts were in his heart.

"Be it so, then, captain," he said; "and now, since all is arranged, let us adjourn to Spadoni's. I am thirsty and hungry, and if I mistake not, there is not a man here who will not be glad of a good bumper of Roman wine."

A murmur of assent came at once from the pirates, and Leoni—who, though reckless and brave as a lion, knew well how necessary it was to keep his men in good humor—assented at once.

Casting aside, at any rate to all appearance, all feelings of animosity towards anybody, he at once said:

"Come on then, comrades; I dare say I am as thirsty as you are. Follow me, and hurrah for wine!"

Abruptly moving away from the fire, and giving the word to one of them to kick the flare out of the burning log, he passed down into the narrow road, which was skirted on one side by the woods and on the other by the sea beach.

This was a critical moment for Jack and his Vultures.

Ernest Harden's brain had been so fearfully excited by the horrible events of the last few hours that it was a difficult task to keep him under restraint.

The pirate was, so to speak, in his power—within his grasp.

There was nothing to prevent him from dashing forward and destroying him.

"Be not mad," said Jack, in a low, stern whisper. "If you want to indulge in revenge simply, go by all means, but if you wish to save your wife and her sister, be calm till we can do something to rescue them."

Thus adjured, Ernest remained calm, and the Vultures, standing back in the shadow of the trees, with their weapons ready for use in their hands, saw the pirates, headed by their leader, take their way along the narrow road which led to the town, the lights of which could be seen twinkling in the distance.

Keeping some way behind, they followed in the wake of their enemies.

Actuated by their eager thirst for drink, the latter pressed on rapidly, and at length the houses on the slopes of the wood-crowned hill became more numerous, and gradually merged into a street.

After this all was plain sailing.

They were soon in one of the most populous and best lighted thoroughfares in the place, a narrow and somewhat tortuous lane, leading down to the harbor, and their first inquiry resulted in their being led at once to a restaurant somewhat after the French fashion, kept by the Spadoni mentioned by the pirate chief.

Without hesitation they made their way in, and, taking a seat close to a table where the pirates had seated themselves, they glanced round at the varied scene.

Never before in his life had Jack beheld such a variety of faces or costumes.

There seemed to be persons present from every part of the world, nearly every one apparently having some connection with the seafaring profession.

There were captains of vessels, mates, sailors, marines, dealers in marine stores, and so forth, all hob-nobbing together, and among them were English, French, Jews, Germans, Italians, and Spanish, all laughing, talking, drinking, as the case might be.

Perhaps the most gayly and picturesquely dressed of all present were the pirates of which Leoni was the chief.

They wore velvet jackets trimmed with gold lace, hats of the same, and breeches, a gaudy girdle holding a long sword, a dagger and two pistols.

They were bloodthirsty-looking ruffians, as pirates are generally.

Dark, swarthy, evil-eyed.

Leoni, his face alone, when calm and enjoying himself, quite belied his character.

He was strictly handsome, with a pure Italian face, looking as if he had stepped from out the canvas of one of the old masters.

Ernest Harden, having cast one glance at this splendid demon, sat with his back towards him.

Too quick a recognition would have been fatal to their scheme, which was to follow Leoni towards the mountain fastness, where he was going after midnight, take him and his followers prisoners, convey them to the *Vulture*, and make the release of their two captives the price of their liberty.

"Mr. Harden," said Jack, as they were drink-

ing some rich, red Italian wine, "do you not think it would be better for us to send one of the men to Captain Hollyoak to tell him how far we have gone with our venture? He might send us reinforcements."

"Do as you please, Mr. Gale," said Harden, "but, believe me, this is a very difficult matter altogether. We are not in an enemy's country, but the French are masters here, and if a large body of armed sailors are landed, we may find ourselves seized and lodged in some military prison. I dread anything which may possibly interfere with our liberty of action when my dear ones are in such peril."

"Look'ee here," said Ben Brace suddenly.

"Well?" cried Jack, glancing round.

"Ye see, sir, the case is like this. Ye want to save the ladies, bless 'em?"

"Yes, Ben."

"Well, then, these 'ere Italians are all as bad as one another."

"I don't know that," said Jack.

"Savin' yer presence, sir," continued Ben, "what I mean, is this. They're all in with one another, and friends with the brigands and pirates. O' course I don't mean any but the lower orders; but if we were to be known to be going up to that 'ere village with the crack-jaw name, to catch these 'ere villains, we'd be way-laid and murdered."

"What's to be done, then, Ben? Danger or no danger, we must go."

Ben bent over, and spoke in a low tone.

The others bent forward, too.

By these means they lost sight of the pirates for one minute.

But that was enough.

"I know we must go," said Ben, "but we've no call to make a fuss about it. By what I can make out of what you said coming along, that 'ere Leoni and ten chaps are going up the mountains as far as Spitzeye."

"Spezzia. Yes," said Jack.

"Well, that's eleven; we're eight. My hi! ain't that enough Jack Tars to fight eleven blessed furriners? Mr. Harden, here, savin' his presence, mayn't be up to much in the fightin' line, but then we chaps are, and, hang me for a deserter if we can't do the job without bothering the captain for reinforcements."

"I think you're about right, Ben," said Jack, "and in order to watch these men, without fear of being suspected, we had better go at once. If we wait and follow them when they go out, we shall be almost telling our meaning."

"Right," said Ben. "But, my eyes! where's the pirate captain gone?"

Instinctively they all looked round.

Ben Brace had made no false alarm.

The pirate chief had disappeared.

"That is strange indeed," said Jack, glancing somewhat nervously at Harden, whose face had become ghastly white with terror; "but his men are here, and they are to accompany him. We can follow them."

At this moment a deep voice beside them said:

"Excuse me, gentlemen, may I speak a word to you?"

Jack and the others turned quickly, and saw sitting near them a monk of the Benedictine order.

He was a tall, stout man, whose face was nearly concealed by his enormous beard and mustache, but whose eyes burned with a fierce and apparently youthful fire.

"Certainly," said Jack, surprised at hearing himself addressed in English by so decidedly Italian-looking a person. "Tell me, monk, of what do you wish to speak?"

"To tell you the truth," said the monk, "my interference may look almost like an impertinence. But having regard to my calling, it is my duty to warn those whom I see running into danger."

"No doubt," replied Jack, dryly; "but, nevertheless, even though we may be in danger, delay will not mend our position. Pray, if you have advice to give, give it now, at once."

"Yes; I know you are in a hurry," said the tall dark monk. "I understand English, and I have heard a little of your conversation. You are in pursuit of the pirate, Leoni. You do well not to try to capture him here. Pirate as he is, Leoni is loved in this town, and in every hamlet far and near; and were you to attempt to do him harm there is not a man who would not rise in his favor—save only the foreigners."

"You speak warmly in his favor, but the foreigners might outnumber his friends," said Jack, eying the ecclesiastic with some suspicion.

The priest held his hands up in horror.

"Saint Peter defend us!" he cried. "Speak in his favor? Heaven forbid! I did but suggest caution, and warn you against the ruffians by whom he is surrounded. You English people must have strange ideas of the priesthood. No,

no; I wish to aid you. Leoni is a great enemy of mine; he has done me wrong, and I will help you and lead you by a nearer route to Spezzia, so that he may be captured."

"If you will do that you will be doing us infinite service," said Jack. "But shall we not miss him on the road?"

"No, no. He must pass the spot where I shall pass," said the monk. "But see, the pirates are on the move. We will be going. I will go first. Trust me as your guide, and meet me in ten minutes on the steps of the church of Saint Mark, in the square without."

With these words he rose, and without delaying to make a pretense of saying farewell, he pushed his portly person through the groups of drinkers, and passed out.

The pirates were busy settling up their scores with the waiter, and ever and anon casting an anxious look round as if in search of Leoni.

They were not kept waiting long.

In the space of ten minutes, just as our hero and his companions were becoming impatient, Leoni, the pirate, appeared at the door, and drawing his sword, made a sign to his men.

In a moment they had risen and passed out, and the whole body, headed by their leader, went slowly down the street.

It was only a few moments after that Jack and his friends passed out also.

The church of St. Mark, where the monk had arranged to meet them, was not far from the café, and they were quickly standing on the steps of the sacred edifice.

But the monk was not there.

They saw Leoni and his men cross the square, slowly singing a dirge-like melody of the sea-pirates.

But not a sign of the ecclesiastic was forthcoming.

"By heavens! I have no patience to wait," cried Ernest Harden. "While we are dancing attendance on this strange monk we shall lose sight of that villain Leoni."

"We will wait but a few minutes," said Jack. "See, they are loitering on the corner of yonder street. Ah! now they go down it. Never fear, Mr. Harden, we shall be in time to catch them up. They are proceeding but slowly, and little dream that vengeance is on their track!"

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE ROAD TO SPEZZIA—THE STORM—EYES IN THE DARK.

JACK and his friends were about to move off, without waiting for the guidance of the mysterious monk, when suddenly a dark form, clad in a long robe, came hurrying across the wide square.

"Here is the monk," cried Jack, "only a few minutes behind."

The monk, when he reached them, was out of breath.

"We must be quick after the pirates," he said, "unless those signs of storm warn you not to proceed."

And he pointed to the angry clouds which everywhere hung black and threatening over the landscape.

"Storm!" cried Ernest Harden hotly. "The fires of the infernal regions would not keep me back from rescuing my wife and her sister from those villains, or from wreaking a fearful vengeance if aught of harm has come to them. Lead on, monk, and quickly."

"Follow me, then," said the monk; "but I promise you that if ever you have wished to see the elements warring in dead anger that wish will be gratified soon."

Up to this moment Tom Meadows had said very little.

He had listened and heard all, but had seen no chance of speaking.

But these words of the priest "put his back up," as he expressed it.

"Are you afraid of a bit o' thunder and lightning, Sir Monk?" he said; "because if you are, we're not. Perhaps 'e's been preaching against the devil all your life, you think he's got a special spite against you. My father used to say—'Keep a clear conscience, my boy. Never make the first to quarrel; never do anybody any ill. Be honest, and you needn't fear the lightning. If you're killed it's an accident, to which all are liable; and why shouldn't it be your turn as well as anybody else's?'"

This was quite a long speech for Tom.

He expected a grave reply from the monk as he strode rapidly after the pirates.

He was wrong.

"My young friend," said the ecclesiastic, "I don't fear the lightning. I have seen death in so many shapes that it has no terrors for me. I have been at the calm death-bed; I have seen the death of a brigand. I have seen the end of men

out on the raging sea, when they have been swarming up the rigging like demons. I have seen them come rattling down on deck, and falling off the yard-arms into the boiling surf, their ghastly faces plunging down ghost-like in the pale glow of the lightning; and yet you think I fear a storm? You don't understand men yet, my lad."

"You seem well acquainted with the sea," said Jack, wonderingly.

"Yes," said the monk, quietly. "I have not forgotten what I learned when I was a fisher-boy at Naples. But let us hasten on; the tempest has begun."

The big rain-drops which usually precede a storm began now to patter down heavily, and in the far distance could be heard the low mutterings of thunder.

The few stars which had been visible were soon obscured by the rapidly rushing clouds, and yet far ahead they could see the forms of the pirates hurrying up the hill.

"When we get a little higher," said the monk, after a moment, "we shall turn to the left and pass along a path which will bring us ahead of them. There you can post yourselves in two companies, so as to command them from two points as they come up. There I must leave you. It would not do for one in my garb to be seen as the leader of an ambushade; besides, they have no respect for my order, and my death would be certain."

Ernest Harden turned towards him with a suspicious glance.

"If you leave us before the pirates show themselves, how are we to know that you are not deceiving us?" he said.

"My desire for revenge would not allow me to leave this night's work undone," said the monk, bitterly. "But as you are suspicious, like most of your countrymen, I will remain until the pirates come up, though my life may pay the forfeit."

On they went, now amid blinding rain, while the thunder boomed and the lightning flashed vividly, dashing with violent tongues from one end of the horizon to the other.

It was a magnificent scene.

At one moment all was impenetrable darkness—the next they could see before them the towering tops of the hills they were ascending, and behind them the rolling ocean, whose storm-swept waves gleamed white in the light of the electric fluid.

It was indeed a deed of daring—almost a desperate deed, this ascent into unknown mountains, which were well known to be the haunt of brigands.

When our readers find us speaking of brigands, they must not think of the milk-sop thieves who infest the Italian mountains and the Grecian Isles in these days, whose ferocity in many cases is limited to their looks.

These men lived in a time when lawlessness was the order of the day, when from one end of the land to another anarchy and bloodshed reigned.

They were kings in their own domains, with no one who dared to punish them even for the most terrible murders.

But Jack and his friends felt confident of success.

Their friends on board the *Vulture* would not rest quiet if their absence was longer than was expected, and they were well aware that if they had brought a large force they would most likely have been suspected.

After a time, however, they passed into the side path.

On either side of the roadway were towering rocks which sloped towards it, and formed a kind of wall of huge boulders.

As the lightning flashed it seemed to Ben as if he saw white, ghastly, grinning faces on either side, and then moving forms, and the gleam now and then of gun-barrels.

Ben Brace, old as he was, was no coward.

He was, as all sailors are, superstitious, but for anything in the shape of human beings he did not care a rap.

In this instance he was puzzled.

It certainly appeared to him that he saw these forms and faces; and yet, as he heard no sounds save the raging of the wind and the booming of the thunder, he did not for a long time like to speak to any of his companions about it.

"Blessed if I know what they can be," he said to himself, "if they ain't human beings, unless they be the sperrits of the people as has been murdered hereabouts. It's a risky job altogether, but keelhaul me if I'd mind it, if it weren't for sperrits. Men ye can tackle, even if it's three to one; but sperrits I do abominate."

These last words were said sufficiently loud to be overheard by Jack.

"Come, come, Ben," he said, "you are romanc-

ing now. You say you abominate spirits, and every one aboard the *Vulture* knows how you like a drop o' rum."

"Ah, Mr. Jack," said Ben Brace, "I does; and as I've got a flask in my pocket, I'm going to have a drain, and shall make bold to offer you a drop. But it ain't them sperrits I were a-speaking of. I were a-speaking of sperrits from the other world."

"Why, what made you think of them, Ben? You're not going to show the white feather, eh, Ben?" said Jack, laughing.

"Now that's too bad, Master Jack," said Ben. "But there, I knows you're only a-joking. But I tell yer what, Master Jack, I can't keep it in no longer. It's enough to make one talk of sperrits when ye see a lot of white faces a-mouthing and a-grinning along the side of the road, and gun-barrels a-gleaming, and that kind o' thing, and never a sound of any feet."

This was said in a hoarse whisper.

Jack's first idea was that Ben Brace had taken leave of his senses; but when Ben clutched his arm, and bade him watch for the next flash of lightning, and keep his eyes fixed on the rocky wall to the right, he began to think there was something in it, and watched as he was requested.

He had not long to wait.

Presently there was a vivid flash, more vivid than there had yet been, and by the light of that momentary glare he saw the indistinct forms and ghastly faces and gleaming weapons which had so startled Ben Brace.

What could it all mean?

There was certainly no mistake on Ben's part. But what could it be?

Was it an optical illusion?

Certainly it did not seem as if what he had seen were human beings, for when the tremendous roar of thunder which had followed the vivid flash had died away, not a sound of footsteps could be heard, only the whistling of the wind and the pattering of the rain.

"Did ye see 'em?" said Ben Brace, in a whisper.

"Yes."

"And are they ghosts of murdered men, or what do you make of 'em?"

"They are either optical illusions, or we are betrayed and surrounded by pirates or brigands," said Jack.

The last word caught the ear of the monk.

"Pirates and brigands, and betrayed!" he cried, with a laugh which sounded weird and hollow in the mountain pass. "Who talks of betrayal? I thought you were all Englishmen. Don't get faint-hearted already. We are nearing the spot where you must distribute your forces and expect hot work. So if your courage fails you, go back at once."

"We are Englishmen, and our courage fails us not," replied Jack; "but we cannot make out the forms and faces which we seem to see at the side of the road."

"They must be illusions," said the monk. "If living persons were there, we should hear their footsteps. But here we must stop. This is the spot. See, here the path opens upon a wider road, up which the pirates are coming. On the left you can plant half your men, on the right the other. In this way you will have them between two fires."

The disposition of forces took but a few moments, and the Vultures proceeded to rest awhile. The storm had now begun to abate.

The dark clouds rolled away over the mountain tops, the rain ceased, and the wind lulled.

Still no stars or moon were visible, and all around was as black as Erebus.

Silently, eagerly the little party waited with pistols in their hands, anxiously listening for every sound which should betray the arrival of the pirates.

But for a long time not a sound was heard as of approaching footsteps.

They were just beginning to get impatient, however, when the noise of voices was heard singing some rude sea-song.

"Here they are!" cried the monk; "and I must away. In such a conflict I could not be present, though probably I shall not be far off. Adieu!"

"But stay!" cried Ernest Harden, "what is your name, and where is your monastery? We may want to thank you for this night's work."

"My name is Alfieri," said the ecclesiastic.

"The monastery of the Benedictines lies to the right of the town. Be prepared, for you will fight with desperate men that fear not death. Benedicite—farewell!"

And without another word he was gone.

By this time the sounds were approaching, the melody of the wild song being wafted clearly over the hills.

"Steady, boys," cried Jack; "wait till I give the order before you fire."

"Aye, aye, sir."

On came the enemy, nearer, nearer.

The hearts of all beat high with expectation.

All thoughts of being betrayed by the priest were gone now.

He had promised to place them in such a position as to draw the pirates into an ambush!

And he had done so.

Presently, just as the enemy were close upon them, the song ceased.

All became as still as death.

The Vultures clutched their pistols eagerly.

At this moment the moon burst from behind a cloud, and inundated the spot where they stood with a bright silvery light.

Not a sign of any one was to be seen.

The small plateau, and the road leading upwards and downwards, were both deserted!

"What can this mean?" cried Jack to Ernest Harden.

"It means that we are betrayed!" exclaimed the latter; "it means that you should not have restrained me when I had the chance of shooting Leoni like a dog."

"Calm yourself," said Jack. "Had you destroyed the chief, Bernardo, the lieutenant, would have been at the head of the band, and all would have gone as badly with your wife and sister-in-law as before."

"But Bernardo is not with them now," said Ernest; "he has gone back to the ship."

"Aye, but when you wished to fire at the pirate he was with them," said Jack. "However, there is no use in arguing. We must do our best. If they have slipped through our hands by some secret way, we must wait over until dawn, and see what is best to be done."

Ernest groaned with anguish.

He knew well what must be the position of the two girls among the savage brigands, who were friends of the desperate villains of the pirate ship.

What was to be done?

The position seemed truly most gloomy, yet in patience would avail nothing, and so, although his heart was on fire with anxiety, he remained on the watch, grasping his pistol with an eagerness which was almost murderous in its intensity.

Time went on, however, without a sound to betray the presence of an enemy.

At length the first gray tints of dawn crept over the landscape.

Anxiously the Vultures glanced round them as the light spread, and the first look told them they had been betrayed.

All around among rugged boulders were posted men with rifles; even the path by which they had come was blocked up by masses of Italians, armed to the teeth, and dressed in the rude picturesque costumes which have become so familiar to us.

"Betrayed!" cried Ernest. "I knew it—I felt it. The monk deceived us. Let us cut our way through these men, and sell our lives dearly."

"Courage!" said Jack; "all is not yet lost. See the path by which they came. There are but few of them there. If a parley is not attempted, we will charge down the hill, and have a desperate fight for freedom."

While he was yet speaking, one of the brigands leaped from behind the wall of rock, and advanced towards the little party.

He doffed his velvet cap with mock politeness.

"The best of the morning to you, signor," he said. "Have you lost your way?"

Jack, whose Italian was the best, stepped forward at once.

"No, signor," he said, "we have not lost our way. We are en route for the village of Spezzia, in search of Pietro Leoni."

The man assumed an air of blank surprise.

"Leoni!" he cried. "Is he then a friend of yours?"

For an instant the idea flashed across the mind of Jack, should he claim Leoni as a friend?

But no!

It would be but a momentary triumph, and would be sure to be followed by disastrous consequences.

"No," he said, "I seek Leoni as a foe, to demand the release of two persons whom he is now detaining as prisoners."

The bold, brave front of the English boy took the Italian completely by surprise.

"Cospetto!" he murmured, "they breed tigers in England."

"You wish to see Leoni?" he said aloud.

"Yes."

"Then we will lead you to him. Throw down your arms, and we will escort you up the mountains at once."

"Keep firm, Vultures!" cried Jack. "Form square."

The men, who at a sign from Jack had hastened up to his side, quickly did as they were commanded, and stood back to back ready for action.

"We never give up our arms," said Jack, addressing the Italian, "unless they are taken from us by force. We will go with you with arms in our hands, or we will fight."

The Italian shrugged his shoulders and waved his hand to indicate the number of his followers.

It was truly a formidable array.

All around, wherever they looked, were enemies.

But Jack's heart did not fail him.

With sixteen pistols a desperate running fight could be made; and he knew the difficult and perilous position he and his friends would occupy if they surrendered their arms and went like prisoners into the very den of the lion.

"Well!" said the Italian brigand. "You see my men. What chance have you?"

"A bad one, but we'll risk it," returned Jack. "Are you afraid of eight armed men that you desire us to deliver up our weapons?"

This was a good hit.

The Italian paused to think a moment.

"Diavolo!" he cried, we are not afraid of all the Englishmen that were ever born. If you were French, now, the fighting wolves of *le grand empereur*, we might fear. Keep your weapons and follow me."

"Lead on!" said Jack; "we'll follow."

The Vultures, at a word from him, resumed marching order, and with him and Ernest Harden at their head, were ready to press forward.

And so they began to toil up the steep ascent, with an escort of brigands behind and on either side of them.

Ernest Harden's face beamed now with a strange fire.

At last he was going to meet his enemy face to face, in a place where Jack could not interfere with his actions.

"Is your errand to Leoni a peaceful one?" asked the Italian, as he walked by our hero's side.

"Peaceful!" exclaimed Ernest Harden, "when he has robbed me of my wife; when he has both her and her sister in captivity; when death itself would be preferable to the fate with which they are threatened! No, we do not go on a peaceful errand. I go to demand my loved ones from Pietro Leoni the pirate, or, if he has done them harm, to tear from his body his false heart, and trample it beneath my feet."

"Hush, hush!" cried Jack; "be calm."

"The signor is angry," said the Italian; "but up here in the mountains, where my master Rinaldo is king, he must endeavor to moderate his language. The precipices are steep, and the paths treacherous on these rocky hills."

They went on now for about a quarter of a mile, until they suddenly came to a place where, either artificially or by some natural action, some huge rocks had been flung across the road so as to form a small archway.

It was a splendid position for defense.

A dozen determined men could have there kept back hundreds.

Behind the rockwork they could see men moving and the gleam of weapons in the sunlight, but their conductor gave a peculiar whistle and passed through.

In a few moments the Vultures and their leaders had entered also, and in a corner, reclining on some goat-skins, they came face to face with Leoni the pirate, who was holding council with some of the brigands.

No surprise was on his face when he saw them.

Without rising, he doffed his cap, saying:

"Good-morning, gentlemen. It is unusual to come into the presence of a man who is being hospitably entertained by a friend with loaded pistols in your hands. Return your weapons to your belts, and then, in the absence of my friend Captain Rinaldo, I will hear what you have to say."

This was too much for Ernest Harden.

With a sudden cry of "Villain! I will have your life!" he sprang forward before any one could prevent him, and dashed upon Leoni.

Even the pirate chief was not prepared for such mad courage as this.

Harden was upon him before he had time to rise from the goat-skins, and in an instant the two had rolled over in a deadly struggle.

Ernest fought with the power of a mad despair, and there was no doubt how the battle would have ended had not two or three of the brigands dashed upon Ernest and overpowered him.

Leoni sprang up, shook himself, passed his hand through his black, disordered hair, and cried:

"Men of Spezzia, disarm these English tigers. Hang me those six sailors; they are useless for my revenge. The other two I reserve for my amusement, and when they have been tortured and disfigured they shall return to their ship,

and tell the captain what vengeance an Italian pirate can take for an insult and a blow."

CHAPTER V.

A MOMENT OF DEADLY PERIL — SAVED FOR A WORSE FATE.

As Pietro Leoni, the pirate, shouted the command to his men that the men of the *Vulture* were to be hanged, Jack called out at once to them, translating the order into English, and bidding them be firm.

"Shiver my timbers!" cried Ben Brace, "hang us, will he, the murdering villain? No, he may kill us in flight, but he won't do that unless we are half dead first."

The pirate captain gave a rapid order, and a desperate onslaught was about to be made upon the Vultures, who were preparing to sell their lives dearly, when one of the brigands who appeared to be in high authority said:

"Pietro Leoni, a word with you. If you order this rash thing you will be sorry. There are only six men here who belong to your ship, the *Wolf of the Waves*, and I doubt if I shall suffer the others to aid you and yours."

A mocking smile crossed the features of the pirate at first, but it was soon succeeded by a scowl.

"What do you mean by being sorry?" he said. "Do you threaten me? Do you not know that I have complete and absolute control over the mind of Rinaldo, your chief, the brigand of Spezzia? What I ask he will do, what I command he will at once approve of, when I explain all things to him. You have seen this before; why then attempt to thwart me now?"

The man smiled.

"Signor Leoni," he said, "I owe so strong an allegiance to my chief, Rinaldo, that were I to think that what you asked me to do was against his interest, I would rather you strike me dead at your feet than do it."

A smile of pleasure was now visible on the pirate's face, and he replied quickly:

"Yes, yes, I know you, and respect you as a zealous and brave follower; but pray explain to me why I should hesitate to destroy these men, whose removal is so absolutely necessary to my happiness?"

"Because I can prove that their lives are more necessary than their deaths," whispered Antonio, as the man was called. "I have just seen the surgeon—our worth, priest and leech—and he says that the least excitement would be the death of the lady."

"But what of that?" cried the pirate. "She knows nothing of their presence here."

"You are wrong there, *capitano*," replied Antonio. "Both she and her sister know that her husband is here with strange friends, of whom she of course is ignorant. Juanita told her all."

"Curses on the girl's babbling tongue!" said the pirate, speaking in such a low voice that no one but himself and his immediate companion could hear their conversation. "What is to be done now?"

"Let me advise you," said the brigand. "Let the lady see her husband and his friend, and let all thought of aught else be set aside for a time. You can have good watch kept here until Rinaldo, my chief, comes, or you can take them away to any other place you like."

Leoni shrugged his shoulders.

"Why should I run about like that?" he answered. "I brought the lady and her sister from on board the *Wolf of the Waves* in order that I might enjoy their society up here in the mountains in peace. I have no need to run away unless Rinaldo desires it, which is most unlikely. I will, however, take your first advice. Let these Englishmen be confined in the large cave, and well guarded. I will see to the ladies."

Then turning to Jack and Ernest Harden, the latter of whom was held firmly by four brigands, while the former stood pistol in hand close by his side, he said:

"Signori Inglesi, you Englishmen are supposed to be men of honor. Will you give me your word that if I take you now into the presence of your wife, and allow you to have an interview with her alone or with your friend, you will retire into an adjoining cave without creating any scene, to await until morning the arrival of the brigand chief, my friend?"

Ernest Harden at first was so astonished by the sudden change of affairs that he could not speak, but Jack saw by the glare in his eyes that he was about to burst forth into one of his ungovernable passions.

"Calm yourself, Ernest," he said; "do not give way to anger. You have a chance before you which you never expected. We were threatened

with death instead of an interview with those you love. Accept it without doubt."

"Yes, I will control myself," said Ernest quickly, though a deadly anger gleamed in his eyes.

Then turning to Leoni, he added—

"You have heard aright. We Englishmen pride ourselves upon our honor. Pirate though you are, and kidnapper of those whom I love best in the world, I will give you my word of honor that after two hours' talk with my wife I will retire. But I make no bargain then as to whether I shall try to have your life or to escape."

"I do not exact that," replied Leoni, with a grim smile. "Antonio, give orders for the English sailors to be led to the big cave. Will you," he added to Jack, "tell them to go quietly?"

"I will; but shall I be allowed to return to them if I go with my friend?"

"Certainly."

"Am I to go with you, Ernest?" asked Jack. "I do not wish to intrude at such an interview as yours, but in case of treachery two are better than one."

"Yes, yes, we must go together," said Ernest. "Even in the midst of this peril my heart seems beating with a strange joy. To think that just at the moment, when we were expecting a violent death, I should be going into the presence of my beloved!"

Jack said nothing.

He had no desire to dash the hopes of the husband, whose brain seemed almost touched by his misfortunes, but he had no faith in the bold bad beauty of Pietro Leoni.

He suspected, in fact, that some treachery was intended, and that they were being led into some ambushade, though why they should all be allowed to retain their arms was something he could not comprehend.

However, any delay was good.

By dint of reckless pluck and daring they had penetrated into the very heart of the brigands' den, and dared Leoni, the pirate, face to face; by dint of this pluck and daring, moreover, they had obtained the promise of an interview with those whom they had come to save.

And having succeeded thus beyond their most sanguine expectations, it appeared to them a glimpse of hope to be able to see those whom they were there to save.

In a few minutes Jack had explained all to Ben Brace and the others.

"Bless my soul," said Ben, "he is accommodating. First, he's a-goin' to string us up to the yard-arm, and then he's invited us to his place. Perhaps he'll be a-givin' us some grog presently."

Tom Meadows had been a silent spectator of all, and he had behaved as bravely as a lion, but he couldn't help speaking now.

"If ever I get back to the farm, Master Jack," he said, "shan't I have something to tell, eh? I never thought that all the wonderful adventures you told me about were true, but now I believe them all. My! to think I'd be in the thick of pirates and brigands so soon!"

"Yes," said Jack, "and have proved yourself such a brave fellow. I hope we shall live to go home together that I may be the one to tell your friends."

They had not far to go to reach the spot where they were to separate, which was the big cave of which Leoni had spoken.

This was entered by a low door, but the ceiling at once rose after a foot or two, and arched up into a high dome.

This room, as it might well be called, was by no means uncomfortable.

It was lighted by a huge hole which was high above the doorway; and now that the morning sun was glinting warmly upon the mountains, the cavern was brightly illumined, and it was easy to perceive every object within it.

There were several tables arranged on the flat rocky floor and numerous benches.

On one side was a large fireplace, with plates and dishes, and cooking utensils, and fagots of wood, and so forth, while along the opposite walls were piles of goatskins, in rows, that formed the beds of the brigands.

This was evidently the cooking-room, and one also of the bedrooms of the bachelor portion of the tribe.

Here Ben Brace and the others were told to remain, and Jack and Ernest were led through an aperture in the rocky wall, and out again into the open air.

Here they found themselves on a plateau, on which was built a small cottage, in the ordinary Italian style.

"This," said Pietro Leoni, "is the abode of my friend Rinaldo, but it has been lent to me during his absence for the use of the ladies."

The last word brought the hot blood of indignation surging up into the face and head of Ernest

Harden, and again Jack had to seize him by the arm to restrain him, and to whisper in his ear—

"Be calm in this terrible trouble, for their sakes."

The pirate knocked at the door.

It was instantly opened by a girl about eighteen, pretty and graceful, who started in surprise as she beheld Ernest and our hero.

"How are the captives?" he asked.

"Very ill. Did not Antonio tell you?"

"He told me of your babbling," said Leoni; "if it had not been for it, these English imbeciles who follow me would have been by this time food for the mountain crows. But, go, tell them that Leoni has brought to them the one whom they have been lamenting."

"What! the husband, whom the eldest signora weeps out her heart for?"

"The same," said Leoni. "Tell her he brings a friend with him."

They had not long to wait.

In two minutes Juanita was back to say that the Signora Harden was awaiting her husband eagerly, and in another moment Ernest was clasped in his wife's arms, while Jack was holding the hand of a lovely girl, whose face wore a look of stony horror from the glimpses she had caught of the pirate at the door.

"Antonio," said Leoni, when he and his confidant were once more outside, and the heavily-armed guard who had accompanied them were somewhat in advance, "this farce must end soon. Think you I have forgotten or forgiven that fellow the blow he gave me on board the *Ariadne*?—a blow which I left him to expiate in terrible tortures on board the doomed vessel? Do you think I have forgiven his nearly throttling me not half an hour ago?"

"It would not be like you, captain, if you did," returned the man.

"Well," pursued Leoni, while a demoniacal look distorted his handsome face and made him positively hideous, "in two days lead those six men down the mountains, and have them shot and pitched into the ravine."

"Yes, capitano."

"At the end of the week the lady will have recovered, and then I will have my revenge on her husband and his friend."

And the ruffian laughed at his own murderous plan.

"But," he added, "I need hardly give you instructions. My friend Rinaldo will be here before two days, and then perhaps he may devise some other plan. Whatever happens, however, these English dogs must die within the week. May I never skim the seas again if I show them aught of mercy!"

CHAPTER VI.

A TENDER MEETING—A STRANGE FRIEND.

BOTH the wife and her sister were eminently beautiful, but their beauty was of different types.

The elder sister was fair—of an exquisite fairness, in fact, with large liquid blue eyes and golden hair.

The younger one had rich dark chestnut locks and hazel eyes, while over her cheeks was a rich olive hue.

Both eagerly welcomed Ernest, the wife clasping him again and again to her bosom, and calling him by every endearing name she could invent, while the young girl, when she had recovered from the horror into which Leoni's presence had plunged her, pressed her brother-in-law's hand and kissed him fondly.

When the first ebullitions of joy were over they all sat down near one another on the rude benches, which formed the seats in the little room, and Ernest told what had happened since that fearful hour when they had parted on board the *Ariadne*.

"And you, sir," cried Mrs. Harden—Lydia, as Ernest called her—addressing Jack, "you have braved these terrible dangers for our sakes. How shall we be ever able to reward you?"

Jack flushed and smiled as he involuntarily glanced towards Emily.

"I did not do it for reward," he said. "It is our duty to protect the innocent and punish the guilty."

"Well," said Lydia Harden, "it would be an insult to your brave heart to talk of monetary rewards. But my family are rich, and if ever we escape from this place and return safely to England, their influence shall be used for your advancement in the service."

"Thank you," said Jack; "any one would be foolish indeed to refuse promotion."

They went on conversing for a long time. Of course, their principal topic was—escape.

It seemed impossible enough. But Jack did not despair.

They had been on the brink of death only a

short time since, and now they were in the presence of those to see whom they had risked their lives.

There was no accounting for the turn of Fortune's wheel.

Presently Ernest glanced at his watch.

"That villain Leoni is giving us good time," he said.

"Yes, for his own purpose," said Jack.

Ernest at once became gloomy.

"You are right," he said. "I fear we have little to hope for; we are surrounded on all sides by bloodthirsty men, who know no mercy. Maybe this will be our last meeting, Lydia. Ha! I hear footsteps. They are coming even now to part us."

In his terrible agony of mind he grasped the hand of his wife and sat staring at the door, pale and anxious.

Jack, who, even though so young, had far more command over his feelings, sat stern and resolute, but calm.

The face of Emily had instantly impressed itself on his heart.

Some may ridicule boyish loves.

But the ridiculous has very little to do with them.

They have often and often turned out well, and, moreover, there is something, some strange attraction, some beautiful linking of nature in young and ardent affection, which is never to be found later on in life.

As the steps approached he felt a sinking of the heart at the idea of quitting her, and involuntarily he took her little plump hand and held it in his own.

"I hope," he said, "that there will be no such gloomy prospects as your brother-in-law forebodes. I trust that by our aid you will be released, and I am sure that both ourselves and our men will willingly lay down our lives to save you."

As he finished speaking the door opened.

But not to admit a pirate.

It was Juanita who entered.

In her hand she bore a large tray bearing refreshment.

"What can this mean? Why this sudden courtesy?" cried Jack.

"Some deeper plan of villainy," said Ernest. "Depend upon it, it bodes no good to us."

Juanita, of course, did not understand a word of this.

She placed the tray on the table with a pleased expression.

Evidently, in fact, she was in high spirits.

"Do the Signori Inglesi speak Italian?" she asked.

"Yes, yes, we do!" cried Jack, eagerly.

"Good," she answered: "I have then a message from the captain, Pietro Leoni. He has been called suddenly away. He sends word by me accordingly that to-night he will return, and that you must expect a quick move to another spot."

"Aye, to the realms of death," said Ernest. "I have no faith in the words or promises of such a villain."

Juanita's eyes sparkled vengefully at this, for she had a deep respect for her handsome and villainous pirate.

"He is not a villain," she said; "he is a brave man. You dislike him because the foreigner finds no favor in his eyes, and he fights only for his country."

"You will spoil everything by your impetuosity," cried Jack, turning to Ernest angrily. "I had hoped to be able to do something with this girl directly I saw her. She may yet aid us to effect the escape of your wife and sister."

"Yes, by compassing their destruction," said Ernest.

"No, no," said Jack; "she would not dare do that. Leoni has conceived such a violent passion for your wife that he would sacrifice any one who did them harm."

Then he added to Juanita:

"Are we at liberty to remain here then until he returns?"

"Yes; you are at liberty to roam about the cottage at will."

"I presume he knows escape to be impossible?" said Jack.

"Yes, it is impossible, unless some of the band were to betray their leader," replied the girl. "There is only one way to leave this place, and that is by the opening in the rock which leads into the large cavern full of men, and by that way you know you cannot escape."

During the whole day Jack and Ernest were able to remain with the two fair captives.

Juanita occasionally made her appearance to bring them little articles of refreshment and even went so far as to take a message to Ben Brace, to be transmitted through Antonio, who understood a few words of English.

Gradually the night came on.

The husband and wife, the latter of whom seemed to recover health and strength with her beloved one's arms around her, seemed never to tire of hearing one another's voices, and Jack and Emily were left entirely to their own resources.

A happy day was that for Jack.

He little thought how many heart achings would follow it.

He was too joyous to give room for such ideas as that.

He forgot where he was.

He forgot the danger he was in and those he knew he had to encounter.

All he thought of was the sweet, gentle face, the lithe, elegant form, the expressive eyes and voice of the one by his side, whose hand lay long and passively in his.

Suddenly came a great change.

They heard the sound of eager talking.

Then a rude knocking came at the door, and, when Jack opened it, Bernardo entered.

Bernardo, Leoni's lieutenant.

He made a low obeisance to the ladies, who, recognizing at once the man whom they had last beheld amid a scene of pillage and murder, clung shudderingly to Ernest and Jack.

"Fear not," he said, "I come as a friend; but time is short, so hear me out without interruption."

"You are a strange ally," cried Ernest Harden, doubtfully; "but in such straits as we are in we cannot refuse friendship from any one."

CHAPTER VII.

AN OFFER OF RANSOM—THE FLIGHT—A DEADLY CONFLICT.

"It is well," said Bernardo. "It would indeed be foolish to refuse friendship now when Leoni's plan is one of terrible import to all of you. He has only allowed you to see each other because he feared that sorrow would kill the signora, whom he has resolved to make his wife. Both you, Signor Harden, and your friend are doomed to death in three days. He intends to persuade the signora that you have been sent back to your ship, but in reality your men and yourself will be precipitated down some of the deep precipices which abound here, and be shattered to atoms and lost forever. There are other prisoners here, who, at a word from Rinaldo, will share the same fate. Leoni and his friend are merciless."

"What vile treachery!" cried Emily.

"Did you expect anything else?" said Ernest, gloomily. "We are alive, as you see, only because for the time we serve his purpose."

"Stay! hear me out," said Bernardo. "He then intends to wait, and as soon as he can cross to the Grecian Isles make the signora his bride. What price would you give to escape such fates?"

Before any one could speak, Lydia had sprung to his side and clutched him by the arm.

"Oh, signor!" she cried, in pure Italian, "my family is rich and will repay you well for any kindness you may do. I should even now have wealth with me, but your men stole it. Pray save us. I, an Englishwoman, noble by birth, kneel to you and entreat you to save me, my husband, my sister, and this gentleman and his brave companions who have aided us."

She suited her actions to her words.

With her bright eyes strained upwards in wild entreaty, she knelt to the pirate.

Hard as was his heart, her beauty and her distress might well have moved him.

But whether he did not desire to be appealed to in this fashion, or whether his own thoughts were not in accordance with her words, we cannot say.

At any rate he turned his head away.

"Signora," he said, "I have every wish to help you, but if I do, you and your friends must help me. I have quarreled with Leoni in my own heart. He knows it not yet, but morn will teach him, for he will discover that, to gain time, I have sent him on a fool's errand. But without aid I cannot live. I wish to equip a ship of my own and quit the coast ere he returns. If I undertake to let you escape now with me, you four here, and the six sailors, and put you on board ship, how much ransom, on your words of honor, will you promise me? Is two thousand pounds too much?"

"Four thousand would not be too much," cried Ernest, surprised at the smallness of the sum, "were we in England; but I know not what money the captain of the *Vulture* has on board. Our united money would only reach three hundred. But if the captain cannot make up the amount I can give you bills on Genoese bankers for the rest."

"Good!" said Bernardo, "I will agree to this. And now for my plan."

"Ah! pray tell us at once," cried Jack: "we are all impatient."

"I may say," said the pirate, "in the first place, that it is fraught with much danger."

"That is nothing," replied Jack; "it is what we must expect. Say on quickly. We are ready at any moment for anything that may lead us to freedom."

"It is well," said Bernardo. "In the first place, then, your men will be brought here by me in a short time, and then, by a way only known to me, we can make our way down to the lower passes of the mountains. For a long way we shall go on without interruption; but then we come upon the outposts, through which no one can pass without a special word from Rinaldo, which I have not on this occasion got. At this point we must fight our way through."

"Very good," said Jack. "I can answer for the men of the *Vulture*. But you; how many can you bring to the battle?"

"A dozen good men and true," said Bernardo. "They are waiting for me not far down the passes, and I have two prisoners here who will prove a host in themselves. They are deadly foes to Leoni, and will do anything to spite him."

"And how many shall we have to encounter?" asked Ernest Harden.

"Maybe fifty," said the pirate. "Rinaldo's men swarm between the town and Spezzia. But we shall have the advantage of being in a higher position."

"Oh, we do not fear the numbers," cried Ernest Harden. "It is not the first time that Englishmen have had to fight twice their number. How soon can we start?"

"Almost at once," said Bernardo. "I will go now to bring your men round. Be ready to start at a moment's notice."

With this he hurried away, leaving the whole party on the tiptoe of expectation.

"Did I not say, Ernest," cried Jack, excitedly, as the pirate left the room, "that we should do good by coming here? You spoke of recklessness, whereas we have attained greater success than I ever hoped for."

"Yes, it indeed seems so," said Ernest; "had it not been for your offer to your gallant commander, and to your restraining my headstrong passion, moreover, we should never have seen even this ray of sunshine in the darkness. We shall never know how much to thank you."

They would not have been thus joyous and elated if they had followed Bernardo.

Suspicious would certainly have been aroused, if nothing worse.

For as he passed out into the darkness he cast his eyes heavenwards; clasped his hands eagerly, and muttered to himself:

"Oh, the signora! The beautiful signora! She is mine, mine!"

What could this mean?

What new treachery was afloat?

Whatever Bernardo's words and manner might portend, however, he brooded no longer on the vision he had mentally evoked, but crossed over in the direction of the caves.

Here he made his way in some mysterious manner into a small cavern at the rear of the largest one, one which was used for the concealment of ordinary prisoners.

Here he came into the presence of two persons, whom, as they will take prominent parts in our story, we will describe minutely.

The one was a tall man, a man in fact of gigantic height, broad-shouldered, with dark hair and regular features, but evidently not an Italian pure bred.

His broad brow, his massive resolute jaw, his firmly-knit frame, seemed to speak of English birth, though his dress was Italian, and suiting well his fierce style of beauty.

The other was a youth somewhat about the same age as Jack Gale, who also seemed more English in his style than Italian.

A youth with a somewhat scowling, ill-looking face, although the features were by no means irregular.

He was sitting on a stool in the corner of the dimly-lit cavern, just before Bernardo entered, while the tall man was pacing to and fro with rapid and angry strides.

"I feel maddened by this inaction," cried the man, as he stood arm-folded and gazed up at the streak of light which filtered down through the gloom from the small hole in the cavern wall above him, "sneaking ruffian that Leoni is! Why could he not have faced me on the seas without taking advantage of me when on shore and in seeming security?"

The youth smiled.

"Ah, captain," he said, "you do not fancy surely that Leoni has forgotten and forgiven? No, as long as his life lasts the memory of Angelica will last too."

"Bah!" cried the other, again resuming his walk. "He forgive! He talk of revenge! Did he not take from me the one I loved? Was he not the cause of her death; and did I not swear to punish him? Did I not do right to tear from him the one whom he was dragging down to his own level and restore her to the convent from which he had stolen her? Revenge, indeed! He will do well not to talk of that. Would that but for one moment I could meet him alone, that even if unarmed, I could tear his heart from his treacherous body."

And at the thought of such a meeting with his foe his broad chest heaved, his hands clenched, his handsome curl-crowned head was thrown back proudly, while the hot blood flashed upon his bronzed cheeks.

"It is in vain you excite yourself, Captain Howard," said the youth; "you must bide your time. It is not likely that Leoni will risk a meeting with you alone. No, no; he has far too much respect for his own life."

"Bide my time, Norman?" cried Ralph Howard. "I fear there will be no time to bide. Unless some miracle appears we are doomed. Our days on board the *Thunder* are over, I fear. There will be no chance among these mountain brigands to have a fair duel to the death. Oh!" he added, as he stamped his foot upon the rocky floor of the cavern and shook his hand vengefully aloft—"oh, for one hour with him on the deck of my own brave vessel, face to face, sword to sword!"

As he said these words the key was turned in the lock, and the lieutenant of the *Wolf of the Waves*, Bernardo, appeared.

Both Norman and Captain Howard started back as he did so.

They had no weapons, while the Italian was armed to the teeth.

"Fear nothing," said Bernardo, in a low voice, as he closed the door behind him; "I'm here as a friend."

Howard laughed loudly.

A discordant, jeering laugh it was, with no ring of real merriment in it.

"Friend!" he cried, "that is indeed a good jest. What friend can Ralph the Avenger hope to find in the den of a robber who is Leoni's best friend? Have I not almost driven him from the seas? Have I not taken from him all he loved best? Have I not made his own men revolt against him? Have I not followed in his track so unmercifully that he has never known what it is to be safe, or to be sure of his prey? Ha, ha! friendship indeed! Tigers have no mercy on each other."

This man, who styled himself Ralph the Avenger, spoke so passionately and so quickly, that it was in vain for Bernardo to attempt to interrupt him.

But, when he had ceased the lieutenant hastened to say:

"Nay, Captain Ralph, I do not speak of friendship from Leoni. It is I who offer friendship—I who say that if you do as I wish, you shall have freedom within half an hour, you and your young comrade."

"Quick then," said Ralph, the Avenger, with an eager glow upon his face. "Tell me what it is you wish? There is little I would not do to escape from the lair of this Rinaldo."

"There is great danger in what I offer."

A tremendous oath escaped the lips of Ralph Howard when he heard these words.

"Do you come here to insult me?" he shouted.

"What care I for danger? Have not I been familiar with it from my cradle? Was I not born in danger, amid the rattle of musketry and the roar of cannon? Was I not bred in danger? Did I not, when but a child, fight over the dead bodies of my father and my mother, to save them from insult by a cruel foe? Is not danger my second nature? And yet you hint there is peril in the path of safety?"

"Nay," said Bernardo; "mine were but idle words. We must make no delay if we would succeed. We have two English ladies here, prisoners, two English gentlemen, and six sailors. For a certain ransom I have promised their escape. It is for a grudge I owe to Leoni that I do this."

"But why does he want to keep them here?" said Howard; "they are an awkward set to have under guard."

"Basta," cried the Italian, "you do not comprehend. Listen to my story."

Briefly he told everything that had happened since the attack on the *Ariadne*.

Ralph the Avenger listened attentively, walking to and fro noiselessly as he did so.

He became evidently deeply interested, a grim kind of smile settled on his face, he clenched his hands fiercely, and a strange light gleamed in his eyes.

Turning quickly upon Bernardo, Ralph exclaimed:

"Ah! so Leoni has fallen in love with this married lady?"

"Yes," replied Bernardo.

"Ah! it is ever his way," mused Ralph; "and this younger one—is she fair?"

"Most beautiful," rejoined Bernardo, whose passion had been roused by Lydia, and who saw in any awakened feeling towards Emily a means of obtaining Ralph Howard's aid for himself.

"He has two treasures, then?" said he. "Well—well, I will assist you. If the British sailors are anything at all like what they ought to be, I have no fear of the result. When do we leave this accursed hole?"

"Within a few minutes. I will procure you some weapons, and return."

"And when we reach port, what then?" asked Ralph the Avenger.

"I will take the ladies and their friends on board, and you will be at liberty to depart," said Bernardo.

"Very good," said Ralph, quietly; "but be quick. The very idea of freedom has roused my blood, and I am eager for the fray."

That was all he said.

Norman, throughout the whole interview, never interfered.

But when Bernardo had gone, Captain Howard sat down by his young companion, and spoke to him earnestly in a low tone.

The face of Norman glowed with pleasure as he listened, and he gripped Howard by the hand.

"One more step up the ladder of revenge," he said. "You are wiping out the old scores quickly, captain."

Their conversation was not a long one, for Bernardo quickly made his reappearance with swords for both and a brace of pistols each.

Then, after cautioning them to be silent, he led them towards the little cottage, in company with Ben Brace and the others.

Meanwhile, little dreaming of any possible catastrophe, the four captives were indulging in charming anticipations of escape.

Never for one moment did the women flinch from the certain danger awaiting them.

Already roseate ideas of freedom floated before their minds, and they could fancy themselves gliding far out to sea on board of the good ship *Vulture*.

They were not left long to their meditations.

Bernardo soon returned with the sailors belonging to the *Vulture*, including Ben Brace and Tom Meadows, all of whom, as may be imagined, looked delighted at the sudden turn of events.

The prospect of a fight in the passes was regarded, as a matter of course, a part of their professional duties.

All were surprised, however, at the appearance of Ralph the Avenger and Norman.

It was such an unexpected pleasure to find that up that region, full of bloodthirsty enemies, there were others of English descent, who were willing to draw their swords on their side.

The introduction to the ladies only occupied a few moments.

But in those few moments Ralph and his companion were evidently greatly impressed.

Significant glances passed between them, and then by mutual consent they avoided each other's gaze.

"I shall have to thank you ladies for my freedom," said Ralph, with one of those bland smiles which so readily transformed his dark and stern beauty into the handsome calmness of an Englishman; "for if it had not been for your presence here, I doubt if Bernardo would ever have dreamed of helping me to fly."

Both Lydia and Emily could not help admiring the grand form and features of the Englishman.

Little did they guess who he was.

Little did they imagine that he was a pirate, more dreaded than, though not so bloodthirsty as Leoni.

More dreaded because he was more successful, and because his will was law among a band that he had gathered from all countries, but had weeded of all indifferent sailors, until they constituted perhaps the best fighting crew on the waters of the blue Mediterranean.

His father had been an English adventurer, who had settled in Italy, and married an Italian woman.

From the earliest youth he had been accustomed to the sea, and his greatest pleasure in the days of his infancy had been prowling about the harbors, talking to and even helping the fishermen, and, whenever he was able, going on board the men-of-war, and examining their every point.

His father and mother were killed when he was only fourteen, and he had, as he had reminded Bernardo, defended their dead bodies against the multitude until the arrival of the armed soldiers.

His parents being dead and buried, and he left to his own resources, he at once took up with the

fishermen, and, working hard, gathered enough together at last to buy a small vessel.

His way was clear now.

The vessels on which he had worked had not been careful in regard to their booty.

They pretended to be merchantmen.

These were in reality no better than pirates.

And so when Ralph Howard had, by saving his prize-money, purchased his ship, he gathered round him a daring and desperate crew, and sailed away with a cargo of merchandise for the Grecian Archipelago.

How it came about no one knew.

But after a prolonged absence he returned with a vessel the same size and tonnage as the *Wolf of the Waves*, painted, and called the *Thunder*.

From that time he had become one of the most noted pirates of the world.

It was just at the moment that his fame was at its highest that he married a beautiful Italian girl, named Bessica, who became the companion of his wanderings and adventures until treacherously stolen from him by Leoni, his rival on the seas.

Finding herself in the clutches of this remorseless villain, and utterly at his mercy, the passionate beauty had stabbed herself.

From this moment, not long before the commencement of our story, Ralph had styled himself the "Avenger," and had sworn life-long vengeance against Leoni.

Never on the high seas had they yet had a chance of meeting each other in single combat.

One advantage had been on the side of Leoni, for, after a more than usually successful voyage, Ralph Howard had yielded too strongly to the god of wine in a low house in the town below the mountains, and had been captured, together with his favorite, Norman Lee, a reckless, dare-devil young Englishman, and carried by Rinaldo's men up to the heights of Spezzia.

For this they expected a big reward from Leoni, and great had been the pirate's delight when he found on his arrival that his rival was safely captured.

He had not yet visited him, postponing the pleasure of an interview until a period of captivity had somewhat tamed the haughty spirit of this terror of the seas.

Knowing nothing of the wild, lawless and desperate character of this man, Jack Gale and his friends were glad enough of this accession to their strength, and were pleased when at last the word was given to advance.

They passed out on the plateau, crossing a room in which Juanita slept soundly, evidently under the effect of some soporific, and proceeding to the rear of the cottage, paused for a moment before what seemed to be nothing but a blank wall of rock.

Here Bernardo bent down and touched a spring, and a door opened, so cunningly contrived, with stone fixed upon iron and woodwork, that it looked like a solid piece of rock moving.

"Follow me without fear," he said; "we shall have but a few moments of darkness, and then we shall be out upon the slope of the hills."

His words proved correct.

They seemed to work their way along a subterranean corridor, and then to emerge suddenly upon a wide roadway, on either side of which were towering hills.

Down this steep decline they proceeded rapidly, until they were met by the men of whom Bernardo had spoken.

They reported that at present all was quiet in the passes, but that a large body of brigands were posted, as he had anticipated, further down.

"Well," said Bernardo, "we must remain here until dawn comes. I don't like fighting in the dark."

"Nor I," said Jack; "it's impossible to see where your enemies are, or what they are like. I like a fight in the open daylight."

"How about refreshment?" said Ben Brace.

"Really, Mr. Gale, I shouldn't ask, only they've been giving us such funny kickshaws to eat—long pieces of stuff like white worms, with bad cheese over it, and oil—and—ugh! it disagreed with the lot of us; and, saving the ladies' presence, if we could have something more substantial like, we'd be very thankful."

The substantiality of anything to be obtained up among those Italians was, of course, very doubtful.

But at length some black-looking bread and some cheese was procured, and this, washed down by goodly quantities of some indifferent wine, had to satisfy the cravings of the junk and rum-loving tars.

A dreary night it was, though not a very long one.

But at length dawn broke.

Shafts of gold came piercing their way down the hills, and as soon as possible the advance was

once more made, the ladies being placed in the center.

Jack's heart fluttered now with a strange excitement.

Bernardo spoke of a fight as certain.

"Well, Tom," he said, as they all began to descend the hills in military order; "we're going in for active service now, and no mistake."

"Yes, it looks like it, Master Jack," said Tom Meadows, "and I think you deserve success. I thought our march up the mountain was a mad-cap thing, but it hasn't proved so, has it?"

"No, it has turned out better than I hoped for myself," said Jack, "but," he added, with a smile, "I can't say that I can take much credit for success, for if it had not been for this accidental quarrel between Bernardo and Leoni, the latter would have had us murdered by this time."

They were not long before they reached the position, which the pirate said would have to be stormed.

It was certainly a strong one.

On either side were walls of rock, where men could be posted in splendid positions, while in front were a few huts, where the road narrowed and became more steep than before.

The muskets of those defending the pass could command every part of the advancing body.

About five hundred yards from the village, if so it could be termed, the marching party was halted, and one of the number sent forward by Bernardo.

He was instructed to say that he was conducting to the town a party of English who had paid their ransoms.

The answer was prompt and decisive.

"Very good; give the password and you can pass."

While this was going on, the rocky wall was slowly filling with men, and Bernardo, resolving not to be caught like a rat in a trap, began to advance.

"Very good," he said, "I will give the password myself."

But at the same time he bid them all be ready.

The messenger from the hamlet went rushing back to his comrades, and in an instant a gun was fired to announce that the battle was to begin.

Jack and his men, far ahead of the others, went plunging on at a good pace, but a hail of shots began now to pour in from the rocky walls; and when they reached the road through the hamlet they saw a large force of brigands drawn up across the road lower down.

"Let us charge," said Jack. "If we are brave and do not hesitate, the very force of our rush must carve a passage."

This was not according to Italian tactics.

Bernardo would have preferred the kind of battle used in guerrilla warfare, sneaking behind walls and large pieces of rock, and firing at single foes.

But when Jack offered to lead the attack with his men, he made no further objection.

Jack at once sprang to the front, with Ralph the Avenger and Norman at his side.

"Come on, Vultures!" he shouted, "let's show 'em how English lads can fight."

"Ay, ay, sir!" cried the sailors at once, their hearts beating high with excitement as they saw the gleaming sword of the brave young midshipman flashing in the morning sunlight.

And away they rushed down the incline, followed of course by Bernardo's men.

It was a difficult and dangerous position for Lydia and Emily.

Ernest held his wife's hand, and Tom Meadows the hand of Emily, as they dashed along; but there was peril at every step, for the road was full of rough stones, and there was danger of making false steps and being hurled face foremost on the ground to be trampled upon by the quickly running pirates.

However, they kept their feet and their courage wonderfully.

The Italians below poured in a deadly volley as the Vultures and the Italians came upon them with a burst.

But the firing did little execution.

Here and there a man was wounded, but not one was delayed by this.

In a few minutes, with Jack at their head, the brave assailants joined battle.

Now, at length, Jack knew what it was to be in a hand-to-hand fight.

He did not in any way lose his head.

Down went the brigands before Jack's revolver.

Weapons and gleaming faces seemed all round him, loud cries, groans and imprecations rang in his ears, but during the whole of the time he fought like a demon.

Without perhaps knowing the exact greatness of his own courage, he performed prodigies of

valor, and, before he was well aware of it, he and his men were far down the mountain slope.

The band of brigands more than fifty in number, had been forced to yield a passage to these desperate English; and Lydia and Emily, forced witnesses of a terrible scene, found themselves amid a band of wounded men, who had fought and won a desperate battle in half an hour.

The brigands above seemed disposed for some little time to make one more effort to regain the losses of the day.

But in vain.

They poured deadly volleys again and again after the now retreating foes, but they did little execution, and as Bernardo and his men hurried onwards to the town, they were compelled to abandon the pursuit in despair.

On nearing the town they rested awhile to count casualties, succor the wounded, and take refreshment.

It was found that two Italians were killed, and several wounded, while not one of the English crew had escaped a slight hurt.

They had borne the brunt of the battle, and Jack, who had led them, had received a severe gunshot wound in the left arm, though Norman had escaped unscathed.

"What is the next move, Bernardo?" asked our hero, after they had partaken of much-needed refreshment.

"We must wait here till nightfall," said Bernardo, "for I dare not approach the town in daylight; and then we must creep down to the seashore and take to the boats. They are all ready, for I arranged that before I came up the mountains."

Nothing, of course, could be said against this arrangement, and accordingly they waited.

As soon as it was dark they began to make their way towards the seashore.

Avoiding the lanes that led to the harbor, they made for a point not far from that where Jack had landed with his men.

Here two boats were in waiting, the one of ordinary size, the other very large and fit to carry a sail out to sea.

Into the large one the Italians went with Ernest Harden, the two girls, Ralph, and Norman; the other accommodated Jack and his men.

The large boat shot away from the shore first under the pressure of oars and sail, and soon, in the pitch darkness of the night, was lost to view.

However, the blue and the red lights of the *Vulture* could be seen still at anchor, and Jack steered straight for them.

Suddenly, on the still night air resounded a wild shriek, a cry of piercing agony.

Then all was silent as the grave.

Jack's heart stood still.

Could there be treachery after all?

If so, why had Bernardo risked the flight on the mountains?

And what could the giant stranger and Norman be about?

They little guessed the truth!

With swifter and stronger strokes, Jack's companions pulled towards the *Vulture*, and after a quick run, which seemed never-ending to their impatient hearts, they reached the ship.

There was no sign of any other boat, and it was with the worst misgivings that Jack and his friends clambered on deck.

What he heard when he had been welcomed by the captain confirmed his worst fears.

Nothing had been seen of any boat in the vicinity of the ship.

During a momentary break in the dense clouds, the look-out had seen a large boat coming from the direction indicated by Jack.

It had two sails set, and was making for a point where, from the movement of white lights, a ship seemed to be at anchor.

"I have been betrayed again," cried Jack. "They have murdered Ernest Harden and flung him in the sea, and have carried the two ladies we had saved to another vessel. Quick! follow the ship, I beseech you, captain," he added, turning to Captain Hollyoak.

"If there is a chance," said the latter; "but I fear my all hope is lost. The ship has already put out her lights and sailed, but I will do my best."

In an incredibly short space of time the *Vulture* was ready and went off like a willing horse before the freshening breeze.

Jack stood with Tom Meadows on the poop, as the vessel dashed over the darkening waters, with a heart full of painful anxiety and sorrow.

His whole soul had gone out to Emily, and there seemed no doubt now that she was in the power of the pirates once more.

And yet, knowing nothing of the desperate characters of Norman and his captain, he clung to the hope that the unfortunate girls would still have protectors.

Alas! if he had but known the truth he would have abandoned all hope forever.

On the road, and during that night of waiting on the mountains, Ralph the Avenger had had an opportunity of speaking to the men, who had left Spezzia under the command of Bernardo.

He had discovered then that the real plan of Leoni's lieutenant was one of deliberate and cruel deception—that he had arranged to take possession of the *Wolf of the Waves*, and, forcing the girls on board, to sail off with them to the Grecian Isles.

This was enough for Ralph.

He, too, had been struck by the gentle beauty of the two sisters; and he determined at once to bribe these men, take the girls on board his own ship, with Bernardo and Ernest Harden, land the two latter at the nearest port, and then sail away on a long cruise with his victims.

He had not heard of the intentions of Bernardo in regard to Ernest, and accordingly he was taken thoroughly by surprise when suddenly he saw the Italian stab the unfortunate Englishman in the back and fling him over into the sea.

He made no attempt to rescue the wretched man, but the event gave a pretext for action.

He at once ordered Bernardo to be seized; the heavily bribed pirates at once obeyed his commands, and the half-fainting and terrified girls found themselves, in less than half an hour, on board the *Thunder*, the terror of the Mediterranean, the vessel over which Ralph the Avenger was captain.

They had exchanged one position for another more terrible still.

CHAPTER VIII.

ORDERS FROM HOME—PREPARING FOR THE CHASE.

It would be difficult to explain the strange difference in the feelings of Jack Gale now from what they had been when he had first engaged in the chase after the pirate.

There was a strange excitement, of course, in the very fact of the chase.

But now it was a changed matter altogether.

When on board the *Vulture* he had pointed the carronade at the *Wolf of the Waves*, he had felt, of course, the excitement natural to a young lad in his first action.

But now he had an additional reason for what he was doing.

The love that had come to him so suddenly had awakened in him feelings which had never stirred his heart before, and he was not now actuated by a general wish to do service to his country, and aid in the rescue of Ernest's wife and sister, but by a special wish to save Emily.

This wish he did not name to any one save Tom Meadows.

By the captain he desired all his energy to be attributed to zeal.

Zeal had a great deal to do with it.

But Emily—more.

The *Vulture* answered bravely to the call upon her, and away over the fog-laden waters of the Mediterranean she plunged on what seemed a hopeless errand.

As she passed under the guns of the northern battery, it was easy to see that the vessel which they imagined to be the *Wolf of the Waves* had left her moorings.

They were not, therefore, on the wrong tack.

And yet, when had she left?

That was the question which vexed and puzzled Jack.

"Tom," he said, as they leaned on the side of the vessel, and gazed over, just able to see the water dashing up against the bows, and that was all, "we're in for adventures now; but they all seem to me to be wild goose chases."

"Well, Master Jack," said Tom, "if they are, who's to blame?"

"I am, I suppose."

"Well, who but you, Master Jack?" returned the ex-farmer's boy. "Still, I must say that dash up the mountains was a brilliant affair. And you would have succeeded by sheer pluck if it hadn't been for treachery."

Jack sighed.

"Yes," he said: "but how about this adventure? See how black it is all round. See how dense the mist hangs over the sea."

"Yes; it doesn't much look like finding out the pirate ship," said Tom Meadows. "It looks more like losing our way in the fog. What can you or the captain do in such weather as this?"

"Ah, Tom, we're both novices," returned Jack; "but we're not quite such novices as that, I hope. Jest aside, I fear the worst; and my heart, Tom, is very heavy."

Tom Meadows was very fond of his foster-brother.

He had fought his battles; had got him out of innumerable scrapes; had gone out of his way to

do him services; and Tom was as soft-hearted as the other was proud.

He could not bear to hear his friend speak in a choking, hoarse voice, such as he had just used, and he seized Jack by the hand.

"Master Jack," he said, "don't give way."

"Who's giving way?" cried Jack, indignantly.

"Oh, I don't mean exactly that," exclaimed Tom, fearful lest he had given offense. "I know you're too proud-spirited to give way, and that like. But what I mean is this. I'm not a fool, Master Jack and I know you were mighty taken up with Miss Emily, and you're a worryin' like about her. Never mind, it'll all come right."

"Ah, that's just where it is," cried Jack, impatiently; "every one says 'it will all come right presently. But I haven't the courage to wait.'"

"What is it then you're afraid of?" asked Tom anxiously.

"I am afraid that my presentiments will prove too true," said Jack. "That throughout the whole affair we have been deceived and betrayed."

"How so?"

"In the first place, Leoni was the desperate pirate who wrecked the *Ariadne*, murdered her crew, kidnapped the wife of Ernest Harden, and her sister, and carried them away up the mountains."

"Yes."

"Well, this Bernardo, his lieutenant, is in love with Mrs. Harden, as well as Leoni. For her he has cast aside all allegiance to his chief, and has seized his ship. It is my opinion that he has stabbed Ernest Harden in the boat, and flung him overboard, and then dashed away over the sea in the *Wolf of the Waves*."

"But would Leoni's men follow a new leader?" asked Tom Meadows.

"Yes. Bernardo had received a large portion of the money and the valuables taken from the unfortunate *Ariadne*. The men follow any brave man who is possessed of wealth; and so you see our case is more desperate. Bernardo may sail anywhere, while his easily won fortune lasts."

"But how about the giant Englishman and his young friend?" said Tom. "Surely they would not countenance a murder, or allow themselves to be overpowered by a few Italians without shouting for help? If they had done so we could have followed them by the sound in spite of the fog."

"Yes; but how are we to know that they too were not murdered suddenly and swiftly in the dark?"

"You are right, my lad," said a voice.

It was the voice of Captain Hollyoak.

"Ah, captain, I did not know you were there," cried Jack.

"Never mind, Master Gale," said the captain; "I have heard every word you have said, and I fancy you are not far wrong. But in the dawn we shall no doubt see something of our wished-for prize. It is my opinion, that as this lieutenant has thrown off allegiance, as you call it, to Leoni, he will not risk a run to any of the Italian ports. He will make straight for the Grecian isles, where he will be in safety among men of his own caliber. But what's that?"

The *Vulture* was making her way right across the mouth of the harbor.

Every man was at his post.

Every gun was ready.

As Captain Hollyoak gave vent to his exclamation, a red lamp was seen moving across the uneasy surface of the sea.

It was evidently a boat's light.

"Boat ahoy!" cried Ben Grace, gruffly.

"What the deuce are you doing there, Ben?" exclaimed Captain Hollyoak, fiercely. "Do you want to be put in irons?"

"No, thank ye, captain," said Ben, respectfully; "but I'm on the look-out, captain, and I know that's an English boat."

And, as if in reply to his words, the sound came clearly over the water:

"Ship ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, there!" cried the captain. "Where are ye?"

"Here we are," answered a voice, coming up thick and hoarse through the almost impenetrable fog. "Message from Admiral Pellew to Captain Hollyoak, of the *Vulture* privateer."

In a moment Hollyoak had issued his orders, the ship was brought to, and the boat having been hooked on, its chief occupants were soon on deck.

The spokesman was a young and handsome officer in the uniform of the Royal Navy.

He bowed respectfully to the captain.

"Captain Hollyoak, I presume?" he said.

"Yes, that's my name," replied the captain.

"I bring orders," began the other.

Hollyoak raised his hand, deprecatingly.

"Nay," he cried, "not orders. I receive no orders from any one save those at home. I fight for England, but my vessel is a privateer, and I am free to act as I please. Pray tell me the admiral's requests, and I will most willingly comply with them."

The young officer looked perplexed.

However, he suddenly recollected that he had a letter.

"Captain Hollyoak," he said, "I am only doing my duty. Kindly read this."

The captain read eagerly the proffered letter.

"Tell the admiral," he said, placing the document in his pocket, with something very much like a sigh, "that it shall be done."

"Thank you, captain, and good-night," said the messenger.

And entering his boat, he once more disappeared in the fog and gloom of the harbor.

It was easy for Jack and his friend to see that the captain's mind was troubled, and it was not long before they heard the cause.

Mr. Breezly came up.

"Just received orders, Mr. Breezly, from home."

"Orders from home!" cried Breezly. "I thought, sir, we were free rovers?"

"No. I hold a commission from his majesty," said Captain Hollyoak; "and so, though I have a roving one, I am still liable to be sent on special service in case of necessity."

"And what are the orders now, sir?"

"We have to cruise about here, and look out for a French merchantman that's due here in a few hours. It has important papers on board. The merchandise, though rich, is only a blind."

"How about the *Wolf of the Waves*, sir?" asked Jack.

"I can't tell, my lad," said Hollyoak. "Although it is not a very paying game to chase a pirate, it is my desire to do so. But orders from home are imperative."

"I wish they'd missed their way in the fog," said Jack, impulsively.

"So do I," said the captain. "But still, I dare not run the risk of being cashiered, or perhaps shot with the rest of my crew. If I disobey we should all be outlaws, and liable to be blown out of water by any man-o'-war that chanced to meet us."

Jack turned deadly pale.

Emily's face was far above admiralty orders to him.

"I only wish I were captain!" he cried. "I'd save those unfortunate girls in spite of all home orders in the world."

"I must not listen to such talk as that," said the captain. "It is insubordination."

"But isn't it horrible," cried Jack, impetuously, "to think of their fate amid those terrible ruffians? It makes my blood run cold; and now, through these orders, we shall lose sight of them altogether."

He little dreamed that out of the chaos of horrors and dangers into which he was about to be plunged he would be hurled into the presence of the very men whom he longed to face.

Hollyoak had the exact spot named for him where the French merchantman, the *Joyeuse*, from Marseilles, would be most likely to be found, and he made at once for her track.

Jack Gale was unable to sleep that night.

He could behold in his mind's eye the scenes on board the *Wolf of the Waves* under its new commander, and he shuddered as he saw the pale faces of the two girls, on their knees, on a bloodstained deck, appealing for mercy to ruffians.

Ruffians who brandished above their heads weapons still reeking with the life-stream of the murdered.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SEA-FIGHT.

DAWN drove from the face of the sea the fog which had obscured it and rendered everything so dismal and impenetrable.

The *Vulture* was not quite out of sight of land.

In the far distance could still be discerned the low line of coast they had left, but not a sign of the *Wolf of the Waves* was to be distinguished anywhere.

This was, of course, the first thought which presented itself to Jack's mind.

But Captain Hollyoak had forgotten all else but the new duty before him, and soon, amid rapid orders and busy work, Jack found himself obliged to banish all idea of those whom his heart yearned to save.

A few hours' cruise, and the much-wished-for quarry hove in sight.

It was a large brig, running under every stitch of canvas towards the Italian coast.

But what was that little white cloud that gleamed by the side of her?

What was that pennant that flaunted so merrily in the breeze?

There was a grave look on the face of Captain Hollyoak as he removed his telescope from his eye after a long observation.

"We're in for tough work, Mr. Breezly," he said. "She's convoyed by a big frigate. But needs must, you know, when a certain gentleman holds the reins, so at her we go."

The French frigate, which was in charge of the merchantman, was close to her, and was evidently carrying heavy metal.

"Yes, sir, we are in for tough work, I think," said Mr. Breezly. "But it doesn't matter. These men are eager for work, and half-a-dozen of 'em will be worth twenty Frenchmen."

There were very few amateurs among them.

They were all men who had seen service of some kind, and most of them had been in some of the most desperate scenes of the war.

So when they saw the enemy from afar, they were delighted.

Each gun was seen to, and praised and patted like some living favorite.

Nearer and nearer they approached the merchantman.

"As a blind, the French flag was run up to the fore, and jauntily over the waters of the Mediterranean in the bright sunshine the *Vulture* swooped towards its prey.

Heavily laden though it was, the *Joyeuse* came swiftly on, with every stitch of canvas spread, and it was not long before it was within hailing distance of the *Vulture*.

Of course, until they had come within that distance, the captain of the latter vessel was unable to see whether it was his quarry or not.

But, at any rate, it was a Frenchman, and consequently a legitimate object of plunder.

Captain Hollyoak, who had a decent knowledge of French, at once hailed her.

"Where away, there, and what's your name?"

"The *Joyeuse*, of Marseilles, and bound to that port."

"I want to come on board."

"What for?"

"Private letters from Admiral Jervaise."

"Can't come aboard. It's against orders."

"Then I must send a boat. My orders are peremptory, and must be obeyed."

Of course, during the colloquy the vessels had been getting closer and closer.

The French ship was on the other side still, at some distance, coming up under press of canvas, as if the commander smelt a rat.

It was Hollyoak's game, of course, to board his prize before the frigate came up, so as to be able to work both vessels against it.

"Stand off, I command you!" cried the captain of the *Joyeuse*, "or I fire."

But the *Vultures* were too near their prey now to be held off.

The French flag was hauled down, the Union Jack of old England run up; no subterfuge was longer attempted; and a ball from a British gun, spinning lightly over the waves, went crashing into the *Joyeuse*, splintering the bowsprit, and creating at once a scene of unutterable confusion.

The captain of the *Joyeuse* was prepared for this.

He had never from the first been taken in by the hoisting of the French flag, which was a ruse adopted constantly in the days of that terrible war.

So when he had hurriedly issued orders to clear away the wreckage and repair damages, he fired a well-directed shot into the *Vulture*, which plowed its way through the timbers, only just above the water line.

"We've an ugly customer here," cried Captain Hollyoak. "We must grapple with her and board her at once, and settle the business in a hand-to-hand fight before the frigate comes up."

The *Vulture* was a racer before a good wind.

She came on at a splendid pace, elegant and graceful as a prize yacht, all her canvas bellying out before the blast, and her guns speaking with good effect as she went.

Every shot told.

But the *Joyeuse* was not silent.

Carrying dispatches as well as valuable merchandise, she had larger and more numerous guns than usual.

And her gunners made good use of them.

But everything for the moment seemed in favor of the *Vulture*.

With its eager swiftness it bore down in such a manner upon its foe that it was soon alongside, and amid a hail of musketry and a roar of big guns, a crashing of splintered wood, and the hoarse voices of men, the grappling irons from the brave English ship were flung out.

"Hurrah, lads! At 'em, *Vultures*!" shouted Captain Hollyoak to his men.

"All hands to repel boarders!" was the cry on board the French vessel.

And as the *Vultures*, headed by Jack Gale, Ben Brace, and Tom Meadows, rushed on deck, the deadly hand-to-hand fight commenced.

It was a most daring attempt.

The captain's plan was to overpower the merchantman's crew before the French frigate could appear on the scene of action.

There would, he knew, be very little time.

But as a rule the traders did not carry very large crews, and generally also they were not very well armed.

In this case, however, the English were disappointed.

The men were more numerous than the *Vultures*, and they were all picked men.

Captain Lemaitre knew the value of having in his ship seamen who had seen service and could fight.

So when the *Vultures* sprang on the deck of their enemy, they met men who looked in their faces unhesitatingly.

Clash, clash!

Bang, bang!

Swords, pistols and daggers went to work.

Young Jack seemed to bear a charmed life.

Where the fight was thickest, there he dealt his desperate blows, urging his men on along the slippery deck, while Ben Brace, at his side, kept shouting:

"At 'em, my hearties! Cut 'em down! Well done, Master Jack! Brayvo for Old England! There's another froggy down. Hurrah, lads, hurrah!"

It was an exciting moment now.

Little by little the discipline and the determined bravery of the English began to tell, and the French crew began to retreat towards the stern of the vessel.

But a new danger was now at hand.

The battle was a far more resolute one and more prolonged than Captain Hollyoak had anticipated, and the French frigate, which had tacked, was coming round on the other side of the *Vulture*.

The sight of it might well have struck dismay to the hearts of even brave men.

It was a large vessel of its class, and it could be seen that the rigging and the deck were crowded with armed men.

Captain Hollyoak was always calm in the face of danger.

He at once gave his orders, told off a sufficient number to check the advance of the new enemy, and urged his men with increased fury to the attack of the crew of the *Joyeuse*.

It was just at this moment, just as the captain had succeeded in driving the Frenchmen into such a dense body that every blow and shot told, that a terrible thing happened.

The *Vultures* were already raising their voice in triumphant cheers, and all seemed going well, in spite of the desperate attack which was being made on the other side, when suddenly Captain Hollyoak threw up his arms and fell.

No matter how brave men are, the fall of a commander is always a disaster.

Jack and Ben Brace saw the fall of their gallant leader, and with Tom Meadows and Lieutenant Breezly, dashed as quickly as they could to the spot, fighting their way desperately as they went.

But there was no hope of rallying the men.

They had the satisfaction of seeing that their commander was not mortally wounded.

But that was all.

Ere they could reach his side, he was a prisoner and taken to the rear.

Meanwhile an overwhelming force of French had poured on to the deck of the *Vulture*, where they met with a resistance they never forgot.

All was smoke and flame and crashing of musketry, mingled with the clash of steel, the wild shouts of the combatants, and the groans and shrieks of the dying.

The Frenchmen were four to one as regarded numbers.

Rash valor had often stood Captain Hollyoak in good stead.

But in this case it had failed him.

Of course there was no chance of retreat.

To have avoided a collision with the *Joyeuse* because it was sailing in company with a French frigate would have been regarded as an act of cowardice in the British Navy.

"All seems lost," said Jack, addressing Ben. "What's to be done? Shall we make a dash for the *Vulture*, and try and save her? To take this vessel is evidently beyond our power."

Of course this had to be jerked out in disconnected sentences.

He was not only out of breath, but he had to strike a blow between every other word, or to avoid one from an enemy.

"We're dead beat, that's my notion," said Ben

Brace. "If it goes on much longer we'll be all in Davy's locker, unless Mr. Breezly gives in."

"Never say die," said Jack, as, avoiding a blow from a tremendous Frenchman, he grappled with another, who was just about to stick him in the side.

The man was a strong and brave one, and amid the struggling through the two fell together to the slippery deck.

It was a terrible position for our hero.

Men were stumbling and falling on or around him everywhere, swords flashing, pistols banging, curses loud and deep sounding in his ears, mingled with the roar of musketry.

The man with whom he was grappling was as dazed as he was by the continual whirl and noise and blows, but he held on like grim death.

Jack's brain seemed losing its balance.

He was held down there as in a vise, unable to battle for himself, yet liable at any moment to become a victim to a stray shot or a sword-thrust.

Bang!

Suddenly his adversary gave a gasping cry.

A shot had passed through his head.

His dead fingers clenched, his grasp became tighter.

In vain Jack struggled.

Every moment seemed to make his position worse.

And, helpless and wearied, he was just about to give up all hope, when suddenly the commotion ceased.

The firing died away, the roar of voices was hushed, the struggling forms stood still, and Tom Meadows, black with powder, and bleeding from several wounds, came to his rescue.

He dragged away from Jack's throat the hands of the dead man, raised our hero to his feet, and said—

"Pull yourself together, Master Jack. It is all over! We have surrendered!"

Jack gazed around him.

Then his brave British heart gave a great throb of pain and dismay.

CHAPTER X.

PRISONERS OF WAR—DESPERATE THOUGHTS—THE
PIRATES ONCE MORE.

"SURRENDERED."

It was too true.

Jack Gale, who had so earnestly desired a brush with the French, was a prisoner of war.

No more chances of prize money, no more hopes of swift promotion.

But there was worse than this in his mind.

No more opportunities of following and saving Lydia Harden and Emily!

This was the thought which sent his brain whirling, and almost bereft him of his senses, as in that second he realized that he was a prisoner.

"Why?" he asked gaspingly. "Here are men strong enough still to fight. Why talk about surrender?"

"It is for the best," said Tom. "Mr. Breezly saw our men being mown down by superior numbers, and knew it was useless massacre, so he gave in. There are not much more than twenty men left fit to fight, and it would be murder to fight on with two hundred round them!"

"Then all hope is lost for our dear friends," he cried. "I care nothing for myself."

In moody silence he remained standing, while the transfer of arms and so forth was made.

But though he said nothing, his face was a protest against yielding up the dear old *Vulture* to a foreign foe.

At length it was all over.

Some of the prisoners were placed on board the large frigate, the *Empereur*, whose crew had wrought all the mischief, some were left on board the merchantman, while Jack, Ben Brace, Tom Meadows, and the sailors were kept on board the *Vulture*, which, with a prize crew, was detached to the Grecian Isles on secret service.

How it made Jack's heart ache to see the French flag flying, where but a short time before the Union Jack had been flaunting gayly in the wind.

This sight it was that made Jack sad, that brought to his mind more than anything the fact that he was a prisoner, helpless, at the mercy of an enemy, when his dearest friends were in such horrible peril.

Jack and Tom were suffered to be on deck, and at our hero's request, Ben was allowed to be with them.

And a sad group they made as they leaned over the bulwarks of the vessel which but a few hours before had been manned by English sailors and flying the English flag.

"I feel as if I were in a dream," said Jack, addressing his companions. "I know it is wrong to think of private troubles before my country. I

bitterly regret the defeat of an English ship. I am full of horror at the fate of the brave men who were my fellow shipmates, but I cannot help feeling overwhelmed by the doom which has befallen Mrs. Harden and her sister."

"Ay, ay, sir! So am I," said Ben Brace; "but ain't there no chance of making our escape?"

"Escape!" cried Jack, "it seems madness to talk about it."

"Unless!" whispered Ben, "we take back the ship."

"Hush!" cried Jack.

He looked round him anxiously.

This idea had occurred to him before, but only in a vague and wild way.

But at any rate it would not do to speak of it too loudly.

It might be unlikely that any of the French sailors understood English.

But there was just the chance, and it was as well not to risk it.

"Hush, Master Jack! What for?" cried Ben Brace, though he showed his respect by lowering his voice. "You don't suppose that any of these 'ere frog-eating Frenchmen know anything about our beautiful British language?"

"I don't know," said Jack, "no doubt those Italian wretches thought it unlikely that we should know anything about their language, but we did. However, no one is near, so if we speak under our breath, maybe we shall be safe. Tell me what is your plan."

At this moment, however, a young French officer approached him.

He had his arm in a sling, and his handsome face was very pale.

He turned to Jack with all the gallantry of his race.

"Monsieur," he said, "will you come with me to my cabin, and partake of some refreshment? I should wish to see monsieur more gay. What has happened is but the fortune of war. One day it is the French who win, the next it is the English. *Voilà tout!*"

There was no jeering, no boastfulness in his words or manner.

He was simply a pleasant, outspoken young sailor.

Jack gladly accepted the hospitality.

A most *recherche* meal was spread.

The Frenchman was quite at his ease.

It turned out that the captain's name was Lefevre.

He was lieutenant by ordinary rank, but he was now captain of the prize crew, and commander, consequently, of the ship for the time being.

"I do not like to see so many brave men confined like wild beasts," he said, as they were sipping some wine; "if you could only be answerable for them, I would give orders for them to be up on deck."

"What do you mean by answerable for them?" returned Jack. "English sailors will not commit outrages of any kind; they will not thief or insult your men, or—"

"No," said Lefevre, smiling, "I do not mean that. If I allow them all to come on deck, will they all take oaths not to attempt a mutiny?"

"Monsieur Lefevre," said Jack, "I will not be answerable for that. They might pass their words in all sincerity, but with their liberty would come other feelings, and they might burst out in rebellion at any moment. No, no, let well alone, monsieur."

"Very well, you know best, monsieur," replied Antoine Lefevre. "I will not put them in the way of temptation. I thank you as a man of honor for warning me."

Jack's eyes flashed fire at this.

He feared lest his words had been misunderstood.

"Pray do not misunderstand me," he cried. "I should glory in the hour which should bring me the opportunity of seizing this vessel and setting the English flag flying once more at the fore. I would not restrain one of them, but if we gave our words of honor, I could not break that, nor could I suffer it to be broken if they once took it."

"*Bien!*" replied the Frenchman, "*bien!* I thoroughly understand you and commend you. Yours are brave men—they fight well."

The conversation went on pleasantly enough as the *Vulture* in the hands of its new master sped onwards like a thing of life.

Jack was bursting to tell him the story of the pirate Leoni's villainy.

And an opportunity presently occurring, he told him all.

Antoine Lefevre listened intently.

"Well, well!" he said, "I can understand your feelings in regard to these unfortunate ladies. Heaven only knows what has been their fate by this time."

"Yes, but we can have revenge," muttered

Jack. "I only hope I shall have a chance before long of meeting them on the high seas."

"If I meet him I shall certainly call him to account," said Lefevre, "if he is not too heavily weighted for me. The wretch has betrayed the French often, and been guilty of all sorts of villainous tricks. Maybe in these seas we may have the chance of meeting the pirate."

"It is Bernado with whom we have to deal now," said Jack; "the *Wolf of the Waves*, is in his hands, and under his command. I fear him most, for he seems the more clever villain of the two."

"Never mind that," said the Frenchman; "if there is any possibility of doing so, I will restore to you the ladies, should the pirate come in my way."

That night Jack's dreams were of a far happier nature than they had been before.

He thought that he was restored to the presence of pretty Emily; that she had sprung to his arms at their first meeting; that the war was over, and that peace and happiness awaited him in England.

All was so very pleasant that the awakening was the more full of sadness.

When he went on deck the first person he met was Antoine Lefevre.

"You are in luck," he said; "there is a sail yonder, and as far as I can see through my glass, she is the very one of whom you are in search. If not she is her double."

"Her double!" exclaimed Jack, in surprise.

"Yes," returned Lefevre; "there is one ship so exactly like the vessel of Pietro Leoni, the Italian pirate, that it is impossible to tell one from the other except by their names."

"What is the name of this double?" inquired Jack eagerly.

"The *Thunder*, and it is commanded by an English half-breed," said Lefevre; "one Ralph Howard, the pirate, who was born in Italy of an English father and Italian mother. He is, if anything, a more terrible scourge to these seas than Leoni himself. But what ails you, monsieur?"

As Jack heard these words, which raised in his heart a new and more terrible fear than ever, he had turned deadly pale, and had grasped the bulwarks for support.

Ralph Howard a pirate!

He had looked upon him as a polished English gentleman—a brave but eccentric man, who would be a shield and protection to Emily and Lydia in time of trouble.

His last hope seemed swept away now as if by magic.

"Your words have stabbed me to the heart, monsieur," he said; "listen, and I will tell you all."

"Yes, this is indeed a sad piece of treachery," said Lefevre, when he had heard all; "but if these ladies are on board any vessel, I should fancy Ralph Howard's pirate ship would be the one."

"Shall you attack her?" cried Jack excitedly.

"Well," returned the Frenchman, "it is not in my orders that I should do such a thing; but if she comes across me I shall do my best—always provided I am not overweighed. I have learned a lesson from the fate of your late captain, and I do not wish to lose my first command from recklessness."

Such words as these found no echo in the mind of Jack Gale.

The impetuous young sailor would have gladly entreated the Frenchman to proceed to once to the attack.

But he knew that this would have been of no avail.

Eagerly he watched all that day with Ben Brace and Tom; but though the *Vulture* seemed to be gaining ground, there seemed no chance of an action just at present.

And so the weary hours of day and night went on, until there appeared in the distance a cluster of rocks, glimpses of high cliff, and low-lying lands, and not far distant a ship apparently at anchor.

"That vessel has a familiar look, Ben," cried Jack, as he clutched the old seaman by the arm. "I could almost swear it was the *Wolf of the Waves*."

"So could I," said a voice; and turning, he saw the young French captain by his side. "If it is, we will overhaul her. We are near the Grecian isles now, as you see, and no doubt the fellow is making or will make for one of the islets there, which are perfect nests of pirates."

Gradually the *Vulture* drew towards the pirate, who, as she advanced, began slowly to proceed again upon her course.

The French captain urged on the ship at her quickest; but, as he came within hailing distance, a look of disappointment crossed his features.

"See!" he said; "the decks are crowded with

armed men. If my orders were to attack them I should do so, if they were twice as numerous; but as I am on a special errand, I am not justified in closing with them, while I have prisoners on board."

"Ah! it is of these prisoners I wish to speak," cried Jack, a sudden light illumining his handsome face. "With the aid of twenty brave British tars you could take that pirate ship. On my life—on my soul—I swear that if you will put arms in our hands, we will, after the battle is over, give them up again. Every one of my men will know that you are fighting to release two English women from a horrible fate, and they will keep their words."

"I will yield myself a sacrifice if they deceive you; let me implore you, by the thought of mother, sister, or one even dearer still, to save these innocent beings!"

The Frenchman was deeply moved by the impassioned way in which Jack spoke.

He paced the deck with eager strides for some moments; and then, suddenly turning to our hero, he said—

"Monsieur, I will do this; I will trust you. If you betray me, I shall not touch you; I will kill myself. Go to your men and tell them."

With a heart bounding with excitement, Jack rushed down into the hold where his companions were.

One and all the British tars agreed to the terms.

"Hurrah for a fight with the pirates!"

A ringing British cheer echoed amid the timbers of the French prize, and, as they poured up on deck, each man seemed to vie with the other in his eagerness to arm—to fight the pirate who had outwitted them.

"Now, Tom," said Jack, as he grasped his friend by the hand, "I will save Emily and her sister, or die in the attempt!"

CHAPTER XI.

READY FOR THE ATTACK—LOST ON THE DARK OCEAN.

It may be imagined with what excitement and delight the men of the *Vulture* grasped their swords.

Like true British sailors, they cast aside entirely for the time the memory of what had passed, and were resolved to a man to fight side by side with their recent conquerors in the attempt to punish the pirates.

"This 'ere beats cock-fightin'!" cried Ben Brace, "to think that a few minutes ago, as ye may call it, we were prisoners, and now we're goin' to fight alongside them frog-eaters!"

"Frog-eaters or not, they are brave men," said Jack; "you can't deny that."

"No," returned Ben Brace; "I don't deny that. But still it do seem strange."

The plan of the attack was simple.

The *Vulture* was to open fire at long range upon the pirate, unless, of course, it allowed a party to go aboard, and then, as dusk settled over the sea, the boats were to be put out, with a boarding party of picked men.

Saucily the privateer rushed onward over the waves, and the French captain presently, standing on the poop with his speaking-trumpet, bawled out:

"Where away there? Who are you?"

"The *Thunder*, from Genoa, for the Island of Samos."

"Can we send a party on board?"

"What for?"

"We are in search of some one."

"Who is it?"

"A lady and her sister."

"No such persons here."

"Can we come aboard?"

"No; we are Italians, and owe no allegiance to France."

"We give you five minutes," cried Captain Lefevre; "if you do not alter your decision in that time we fire!"

The pirates were in no mood for compliance.

With a loud and ringing cheer, which rolled defiantly over the waters, they ran up their horrid emblem—

The death's head and crossbones!

And then, as a more resolute reply still to the command of the Frenchman, they fired.

The shot came ricocheting over the waves, and went down perilously near the stern of the *Vulture*.

But it did no damage.

In an instant Lefevre gave his orders, and a shot from the *Vulture* went whizzing in the direction of the *Thunder*.

Then another and another followed, and it was easy to see that considerable damage was being done.

It was not, of course, to the interest of the

pirate Howard to engage in combat with a privateer.

But, in this case, the *Vulture* was directly interfering with his plans; and he depended upon the desperate courage of his men for certain victory.

So tacking, he fired a broadside at the *Vulture*, who, as we know, had no desire to come to close quarters until darkness fell over the sea, and the English bull-dogs could be let loose with their French companions.

For the present, therefore, he contented himself with sending an occasional shot at the pirate, and tacking and dodging hither and thither round him, so as to keep him within firing distance, without resorting to hand-to-hand fighting.

Thus it went on for some time.

The pirate chief was quite disconcerted by this strange mode of procedure.

But he kept his vessel well in hand, evidently desirous of keeping to the spot where he had been anchored.

"He has some special business in this spot," said Jack to the French captain.

"Ay! these Grecian Isles are a perfect nest of pirates, and no doubt he has many friends among them," replied the French captain. "My plan now, as soon as it is dark, is to crawl up near to him and haul in sail as if at anchor. Then I leave the work to the boats."

As the darkness fell the *Vulture* sailed off on a different tack and got just beyond range.

Then came the critical moment.

The night was not too black for them to see the hull of the *Thunder* in the distance, but of course it would have been a matter of extreme difficulty for the pirates to have seen the small boats making their way over the voiceful sea.

A steady wind was blowing, but the water was not choppy, but flowing in great rolls, which made it anything but a pleasant adventure to look forward to.

But the English part of the boarding party thought nothing of unpleasantness or danger.

All they experienced was pleasure at the idea of having the chance of rescuing or avenging their unfortunate fellow countrywomen.

Four boats were quickly launched.

In the first went the French lieutenant, who was given the command of the boarding party, while Jack and Ben, with Tom and six other sailors, went in a much smaller craft.

And so with muffled oars they started.

The coast was so near now that they could see ever and anon the twinkling of lights.

"I think we're in luck," said Jack to Ben Brace in a low whisper; "we couldn't have had better weather if we tried for it."

"You're right," said Ben Brace; "but these 'ere seas are so treacherous, and these Italians so artful, there's no knowing what may turn up."

"Don't begin croaking," cried Jack, "for my heart is bent upon success. My whole soul is fixed upon saving these two unfortunate girls, even at the cost of my life."

"Oh! I ain't croaking," said Ben, in as low a tone as Jack. "I feel just as anxious as you do, and will cheerfully do as much as you do, only these 'ere Greeks, and Italians, and French are a rum lot, and I don't like 'em. They're up to such hanky-panky tricks that ye never know how to catch 'em."

"And there! by Neptune!" he cried suddenly, in a louder tone, "if I ain't right."

"What's the matter?" asked Jack, following the direction in which the old man pointed.

"Lots the matter!" exclaimed the old salt. "Can't you see that the confounded warmin't's stealing off?"

"You are right, Ben; the rascals are drawing inland."

Evidently this had been the long intended ruse. Slowly over the dark waters the *Thunder* was gliding inland.

With all her white sails set, she looked as if she were some phantom gliding over the sea.

The French lieutenant saw at once the maneuver, and glanced anxiously round at the *Vulture* to see if Captain Lefevre had been induced to move.

But he had not suffered himself to be taken unawares.

The *Vulture* remained motionless, as if unconscious that his enemy was attempting any ruse whatever.

"Good!" said the Frenchman; "I know now what to do."

Evidently the pirate was perfectly unaware that there was any proposed attack by boats.

If he had been cognizant of the fact it would of course have been easy to avoid it.

As it was, he continued to steer straight across the course that the boats were taking, right in the teeth, therefore, of danger.

The boats' crews adopted now a strange maneuver, each one attaching itself to the other by ropes, so that when the first one had seized the chains of the pirate vessel, the others could be drawn up quickly.

It was a perilous undertaking.

It was just the sort of thing that British tars delight in, and not one was there who did not watch eagerly for the moment when he should have the chance of grappling with their desperate enemies.

Suddenly, however, disappointment overtook them.

"What's up?" cried Ben Brace.

And as Jack turned, he beheld what made his heart sink.

A terrible darkness had fallen on the sea.

A sudden and unaccountable mist came rolling from off the land, blotting out everything as it approached, hiding the land, and swallowing up, as it were, sea and sky.

As it came on everything disappeared before it, and in a few minutes, as it were, the occupants of the boats found themselves in a dense yellow fog, and unable to see each other.

For a moment or two, looking back, they could make out the *Vulture*, a dark mass far away, and then that was swallowed up, too.

"Well, this 'ere's a nice thing," said Ben Brace; "it's a land fog blown out to sea! I thought we was a-going on too good to last."

Jack's heart felt bursting with disappointment.

There seemed no chance now of reaching the pirate.

The boats were now laboring in a choppy sea, where all was impenetrable darkness.

"What had better be done?" said Jack.

"I don't know," said Ben. "Our French friend 'll give us our orders, I suppose."

"You are right," returned Jack; "we are not our own masters. Confound this fog! We couldn't even see a ship's light if it were near us."

"The *Vulture* will bear up towards us if she can," said Ben. "We must keep a sharp lookout. What in the name of Davy Jones are those frog-eaters up to? See how the rope is straining! Steady, lads! steady there!"

As he shouted out this direction to the rowers, the rope snapped; the boat was swirled round in a rough roar of water, and a huge body rushed by.

A Black Phantom, just dimly perceptible, sucking the boat towards it as it went, one red light seen dimly high up aloft. The pirate ship was upon them, and they alone with no help nigh save their own British courage.

Jack dexterously turned the boat aside, and amid the most breathless suspense, the pirate ship glided past and disappeared in the darkness.

"*Vultures* ahoy!" shouted Jack.

But no answer came from the boats.

Again and again they shouted. But in vain.

They were alone on the bosom of a rolling sea, with black darkness—pitch black darkness—above—below—around them.

"Well, Master Jack," said Ben, "we are in queer straits. But never say die is our motto. Give your orders, sir, and we'll obey them."

"Pull ahead, then," said Jack. "If we've not lost ourselves altogether, we shall reach land that way."

"Aye, aye, sir!" was the answer.

And the men bent to their oars with a will.

"It's my notion that those boats were run down," said Ben Brace, "and that's the last we shall see of the *Vulture* and her crew for many a long day."

There was no intention in the mind of Jack to break his word and make his escape from his captors.

But the course he was about to pursue was the only one he could now with safety adopt.

They could not tell where the *Vulture* was, and to keep rowing out into the open was sheer madness.

So they pulled on as hard as they could in the direction where they supposed the land lay.

As they went the wind began to freshen, the waves became more lumpy, and the fog began to lift from off the face of the water.

The breeze blew straight inland, and the boat, under its influence and the force of the six oars, sped along at a good speed.

"Supposing we fall in with the pirates now," said Ben Brace presently, when they were resting for a moment. "What are you going to do then?"

"I don't know," said Jack, despairingly. "I can form no regular plan in my mind. Certainly we cannot attack a ship load of desperate men, but something may turn up to give us a chance of speaking to the captives. But how the wind is freshening! We shall soon be along shore."

"Yes, slap among the breakers, I'm thinking,"

said Ben, "and that means death for some of us if we're not careful."

There wasn't much room for being careful, in reality.

They were going on with the wind and tide swiftly, and if they had headed the boat the other way they would have been helpless to arrest its progress.

So on they went towards the Grecian shore.

Presently they emerged as it were into the light.

The side wind had driven off the fog from the coast line, and they once more went on under a starlit sky.

But they could see nothing of either the pirate or the *Vulture*.

The latter was completely hidden by the bank of fog which had crept over the sea like a solid mass.

And as for the *Thunder*, she seemed to have entirely disappeared.

As they approached the shore they could hear the sullen roar of the breakers over the rocks, and against the face of the cliff see the spray flung up in fantastic shapes towards the sky.

They could not but know that they were in deadly peril.

But nothing which they could do would have sufficed to alter their course.

They were drifting helplessly onwards, only able to keep the boat straight and no more.

On they went.

The wind was getting stronger, the voices of the waves were becoming louder.

More perilous looked the line of breakers—blacker and more threatening the coast.

"Easy, boys!" cried Jack; "let's try and get into the clear water yonder."

He pointed as he spoke to a wide piece of water to the right of the breakers.

But it was at once seen that the task was well-nigh impossible.

As they went, so the swirl and rush of the angry waves seemed to suck them towards them, and they at length recognized the fact that they were indeed in deadly peril.

"What is to be done?" asked Jack, of Ben Brace. "It seems as if we were in for some accident or another."

He tried to make light of it even now.

But Ben was more serious.

"Yes, Master Jack," he said; "we have got to look out for ourselves, I do believe. Steady, my lads: it'll be every one for himself in a moment."

The sailors kept as well as they could towards the clearer water.

But it was not to be.

Everything was bent on driving them to destruction.

Jack became alarmed.

It seemed absurd to rush thus in the face of danger, and he cried—

"Haden't we better turn her head to sea again, until the tide is more still?"

"It's no good, Master Jack," cried Ben Brace. "I'd have asked you to do that long ago, only I knew the danger of it. We'd better keep on, and make the best of it."

So they did.

Carefully steered by Jack, they made a strenuous effort to avoid the danger by a bold and a strong pull.

But it was to no effect.

The wind was blowing now fiercely, and howling over the white-crested billows, and the water was flung up high above the little craft.

Now it was tossed high like a piece of cork.

Then it sank down, deep below the level of the sea, to be tossed skyward again the next moment.

"Easy, lads, steady!" cried Jack.

At last the catastrophe came.

Just as they had reached a point where there seemed to be at any rate a possibility of making for a little bay, the skiff was suddenly caught on the side by a heavy wave, and in an instant every one was in the water.

Jack had only just time to comprehend the extent of the calamity, then his forehead struck against a sharp rock, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER XII.

ON SHORE IN THE PIRATES' ISLE.

WHEN Jack woke again he was in a large stone chamber, the rugged nature of which told at once that it was a cavern.

The dull murmur of plashing water, moreover, made him aware that he was still near the sea.

His senses were at first so confused that he was unable properly to comprehend what had occurred.

A dull aching pain was in his temples, his brain was in a whirl, and in the dull light of the fire in

the cavern he was at first unable to distinguish objects.

As soon as his eyes became accustomed to the light, he saw that he was indeed in a large cave, where a fire had been lit, and where Ben Brace and Tom Meadows were sitting close to the red glow of the burning logs.

No sign was there of any one else, and the two who were there were engaged in a most earnest conversation, glancing over at him ever and anon, and unable of course to see in the dim light whether he was awake or not.

A dread entered his mind at once, and for an instant he was unable to speak.

Where were his other comrades?

Had the sea engulfed them?

Or had they all fallen once more into the hands of the pirates?

Then he thought of the young girl who had so quickly and completely taken possession of his heart.

These thoughts passed through his mind quickly.

Then he said:

"Ben Brace!"

He spoke in a low voice for fear of being overheard.

In an instant the old sailor and Tom Meadows were on their feet.

"Ha, Master Jack!" cried the former, and in an instant both had rushed to the side of the young midshipman, as he lay on the couch they had improvised for him out of sea-weed and their jackets.

"Where am I?" asked Jack. "I feel very confused and exhausted."

"Well, it'd be a difficult thing to tell ye where you exactly are," cried Ben Brace, "but this one thing is certain: we're on the coast o' one of the Grecian islands."

"And our friends?"

"Alas!" said Ben Brace, "I fear they're gone. Only me, and Tom here, and you have turned up since the boat upset."

"Heaven help them!" murmured Jack. "And what of the *Vulture* and the pirate?"

"We haven't seen anything of our old vessel," said Tom Meadows; "and as for the pirate, we've lit just on his home, or one of his homes or something."

He said this in a low tone as if he were afraid of being overheard.

But Jack did not observe this.

He was too excited to think of any secrecy.

"The pirate here?" he cried. "Where?"

"Hush, Master Jack," said Ben; "he is here. His ship is in the offing, and these 'ere caves are part of his den."

"You have brought me right into the lion's den, then, with a vengeance," said Jack. "But how did you get here without being seen?"

"I don't think that they use this 'ere cave now," said Ben; "only in case of emergencies like. But they're swarming about here. Everywhere you go there they are, armed to the teeth."

"And the ladies?" asked Jack.

"I don't know anything about them exactly, but I think they have got some one here not belonging to them. I can't tell why I think so exactly, but they seem fidgety like, and as if they were on the watch."

"Ah," said Jack despondingly; "but that may be only because they are on the lookout for Leoni, who is bound to be on their track if he can. Still, I hope they are here, even though I don't see my way clear to be of any use. How about the boat?—is it lost?"

"It is smashed up," said Ben.

"What can we do then?" asked Jack. "Are there any other inhabitants on the island?"

"I can't say," said Ben Brace; "it doesn't seem like it. All I have seen look like brigands or pirates."

"Then what is to be done?"

"Nothing, until you seem able to get about," said Ben. "How do you feel?"

"Well," cried Jack, "I'm very hungry, and very faint altogether, and my head keeps whirling round, but I think I shall be all right when I have had a breath of fresh air and some food."

Ben made an ugly grimace at this.

"As for food," he said, "I don't know what we're to do. But here's a drop o' rum; it ain't much, but it's good."

Jack, for lack of anything better, drank a drop of the sailor's favorite liquor, and in a few minutes he was able to move about, and with Ben and Tom he made his way to the mouth of the cave.

It was bright morning.

Over the heaving bosom of the mighty ocean the sun's golden glory was falling resplendently.

The stormy wind had long since abated, and only tiny wavelets checkered the surface of the sea.

Over this surface could be seen the white sails of many a ship.

Near at hand, in the offing, was Ralph Howard's black-hulled pirate vessel.

Looking round him landwards, Jack could see that the wild rocks, on which his strange fortune had cast him, were literally honey-combed by Nature.

A succession of caves faced the ocean, close down to the water's edge, so close that it seemed as if at high tide the waves must roll in.

Above them, perched high above the billows, were several small huts made of stone and wood, and lumps of chalk, while here and there green masses of verdure could be seen growing on their sides and summits.

No one was to be seen anywhere.

"There doesn't seem any sign of life anywhere," said Jack, disappointedly. "Perhaps the monster has landed with his victims in some other spot, and sent his men on here to await him."

"He must have been desperately quick about it, then," said Ben. "I don't fancy it's at all likely. I think that all these 'ere caves communicate somehow, and they're restin' in 'em. Maybe we'll be able to find some hole where we can crawl through to their place, and at any rate hear all they say."

Jack shook his head.

He was interrupted in his meditation by an exclamation of joy from Ben Brace.

Glancing in his direction, he saw him up to his knees in water among the jagged rocks, busily bringing up things which he placed on the dry ground above.

"What have ye got there?" asked Jack, in surprise.

"The means of carrying on a siege," said Ben.

And in very truth he had,

He was landing oysters, crabs, gray mullet, and little lobsters which had been washed in by the fierce tide of the night, and both Jack and Tom Meadows were soon eagerly helping him.

No one had liked to complain openly.

But each one was suffering the pangs of hunger.

They had not tasted food for sixteen or eighteen hours.

This was a most delightful and unexpected feast, and accordingly they collected as many as ever they could before they commenced upon them.

The oysters and limpets they could eat raw.

The others they roasted at the fire in the cave which had been lighted from the relics of the ill-fated boat.

It was while they were eating some hot lobster, wishing that they could wash it down with some fresh water, that they started suddenly.

"Hark! Silence!" cried Jack; "I hear men's voices."

Wherever they proceeded from, they were very near at hand.

"We must be careful," said Ben Brace. "The walls of these 'ere caves are very thin, and if we can hear them, they can hear us. There's a crevice like a cupboard up yonder. We'd better take the rest of our provisions there, and put this fire out. Then we can listen and reconnoiter a bit in the dark."

No sooner said than done.

The remainder of the shell-fish was at once carried away to what Ben Brace had called the cupboard, and the fire extinguished.

Then they listened intently.

The voices were soon heard again.

This time in the direction of the very place where they had stowed their provisions.

This crevice seemed to extend a good distance into the rock.

As they entered it they could hear the sounds far more plainly.

"I will crawl in and listen," said Jack. "You remain here."

"Use caution, Master Jack; these pirates have no mercy or regard for a British sailor's life."

Going on his hands and knees, which was necessitated by the lowness of the ceiling of this part of the cave, Jack found that it curved round to the right, in the direction of the second cavern, and as he went on the voices became louder and louder, until by pausing he could almost hear the words.

With a heart beating high with a sudden hope, he pressed on.

The opening became smaller, but it was still big enough to allow a man's body to pass.

And so, thinking nothing of the difficulty he might experience in returning, he only struggled still onwards.

Presently his hope was realized.

The crevice went on until he found that it widened a little and opened into the second cave.

Crouching low, Jack beheld a strange scene.

From his point of vantage he could see all, and

his heart gave a great leap as he beheld the scene within the cave.

On a pile of skins, which was kept from the coldness of the stone floor of the cave by a mattress brought from the cabin of the pirate ship, lay Lydia Harden.

By her side on a little stool sat Emily.

Lydia was pale and wan, and evidently from the wildness of her eyes, and the tossing to and fro of her head and arms, was under the influence of some raging fever.

Emily was sitting sad and weary looking.

Her eyes were turned upon the sufferer by her side every moment, and then again they would be fixed upon the rocky side of the cave with a far-off look, as if she was unconscious of where she was.

Jack glanced round the place to see if it was safe to advance further.

It was not.

In the cave were fully a dozen fierce-looking pirates eating and drinking, while a couple of Greek girls were flitting to and fro in and out the entrance, bearing refreshments.

Ralph, the pirate Avenger, himself was near the fire, talking in a low tone to the wild-looking beings, who appeared more like Greek brigands than the trim-looking set of villains who owned Leoni as a master.

What a yearning look it was which Jack turned towards the two girls, the one now oblivious to her misfortunes, the other wrapped in sorrow!

Yet what could he do?

He could only return to his companions with the news of what he had discovered, so that they might be able to prepare for all eventualities.

Accordingly, with one long, lingering glance at the face of Emily, and a sigh which came from his very heart, Jack turned back once more in the direction of his companions.

He found Ben Brace and Tom Meadows eagerly expecting him.

They had naturally become anxious at his prolonged absence.

"Where have you been all this time, Master Jack?" asked Ben. "We thought you'd got stuck or something."

"No; I've found out something important," replied our hero. "Those whom we seek are here, and in safety, as it seems. Mrs. Harden is in a fever, I fear, however, and her sister is tending her."

"Were you able to speak to them?" asked Tom Meadows.

"No," said Jack; "there were a dozen pirates there, all armed, and I dared not move, for fear of being discovered. But they are feasting, and no doubt will depart when they have had their morning meal. Then will be our time to have an interview with the sisters, and perhaps arrange something towards escape."

"Yes," said Ben Brace; "but we had better go with you, or there may be a chance of your being betrayed and killed."

"Ah, we will see to that anon," said Jack; "but I must go back now and watch. The instant the pirates retire I will come and tell you."

"Are your pistols all right?" asked Tom Meadows, anxiously.

"Yes," replied Jack. "I placed them before the fire, and dried the powder well this morning while you were catching the fish. Keep as quiet as you can while I am gone, for you don't know how they may be prowling about."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Ben Brace; "we'll keep quiet; and do you, Master Jack, keep good care of yourself among these deceitful murdering varmint."

"All right," said Jack.

And once more he began his progress through the dark aperture.

As he approached the opening all was still.

Again his heart failed him.

Could they once more have eluded him?

Could they, in fact, have removed the sick woman and her sister in so short a time?

But no.

This seemed impossible.

However, at any rate, he pressed onward, and his doubts were soon set at rest.

Lydia and Emily were there, and were guarded by one pirate, whose back was turned towards them, and whose principal occupation seemed to be nodding at the fire, and drinking out of a bottle, which no doubt contained spirits.

Evidently the other pirates had gone.

A daring scheme at once entered the mind of Jack.

He would creep into the cave, overcome the pirate, and arrange with the two girls a plan of escape.

He knew that he would find no opposition on their part.

However desperate the plan, they would agree to it.

He was just debating in his mind whether or

not he should wait until the pirate became more tipsy, when a voice behind him cried—

"Hist, silence!"

He was startled for an instant, but in another moment he had recognized the voice of Tom Meadows.

"What is it, Tom? Fresh danger?" he said, in a low tone, turning round as well as he could.

"Ben Brace has been on the lookout, and he says that the pirates are gone."

"Is he certain?"

"He is certain as regards most of them," returned Tom.

"But there sits one," whispered Jack.

"Ay, ay," said Tom; "but we saw a rare lot of them departing. They must have nearly all gone at any rate, and we three are enough for what remain."

They were of course far back in the shadows when they spoke, so that even if a murmur as of voices had been heard and attracted the notice of any one, no sign of their presence would have been seen.

Once or twice Emily, sitting listlessly by the side of her suffering sister, thought that she heard a sound and started.

But then in a moment she lapsed again into quietude.

"Good news," said Jack; "but as you are here tell Ben Brace to keep a lookout at the entrance of our cave. If anything wrong happens, I will rush thither at once."

"Very well," said Tom. "But shall I stay with you to overcome that big fellow there?"

"No," said Jack, "I think I'm enough for that villain."

And with great reluctance Tom retired.

Jack waited again patiently for a quarter of an hour.

During this time the man who was nodding at the fire had partaken of a great many more sips of raw spirit and fallen nearly asleep, stretching himself full length opposite the fire, while Emily herself had lapsed into semi-unconsciousness by the side of her sister.

"Now is my time," thought Jack.

And he began to creep forward.

But he had not gone far when he recoiled again.

Two shadows darkened the entrance of the cavern, and in another moment two Greek girls entered, clad in the picturesque attire of their nation, and bearing baskets containing rich fruits, and wine, and dainty white bread.

He had just time to draw back, when they tripped across the rocky floor, and approached the couch of skins where Lydia lay.

The suffering woman, of course, could not express or even understand the gratitude that swelled her own heart.

She was too far gone to be able to speak, but Emily could thank the bringers of the feast, for the melons, and grapes, and peaches were delicious and most acceptable.

The girls did not step long.

Their appearance and departure gave Jack hope.

The pirates were evidently gone.

So, as soon as they had passed out, he crept in.

The burly pirate by the fire had lapsed into sleep, overcome by frequent potations.

So, noiselessly, our hero passed along the floor of the dimly-lit cave to the spot where Emily sat.

She saw him as he approached, and sprang up with a little cry of alarm.

"Hush, hush, dear girl, for Heaven's sake!" he cried. "It is I, Jack Gale."

She dropped down again on her seat.

"Oh, Jack," she murmured, as he drew near and smothered her hand in kisses, "why do you come into such danger for us? Not that I do not thank you for myself and my poor sister, but they will be here again in a moment. See, here come the pirates!"

And as Jack turned he saw darkening the doorway the shadow of two men's forms, armed to the teeth.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TERRIBLE STRUGGLE.

WHAT was to be done in this critical position?

There was no doubt that Jack's life would be sacrificed if he was found alone with the two girls in the pirates' den.

To make for the aperture by which he had entered was utterly impossible without at once being seen by the pirates.

In this instant of peril he could only appeal to the young girl.

"Emily," he cried, "quick! Let me hide somewhere."

The girl, though her heart was beating tumultuously, did not lose her presence of mind.

"Behind the pile of skins yonder—quick!" she cried.

And as Jack obeyed her behest, she took from her shoulders a shawl and threw it over him.

As she did so the shadows passed out of the wide entrance of the cavern, and the two men approached, followed by six more.

Ralph Howard was the one who came first to the side of the two girls.

"How is your sister now?" he said, in a voice of respect, which served well to cloak the burning ardor of his soul. "Is she better?"

Emily, whose bosom was torn by a strange tumult of emotion, fearing this terrible man, and dreading also what would happen if he found Jack, said tremulously—

"How can you ask? How can you expect her to be anything but near death when her heart is overwhelmed with terror and despair?"

Howard was proof against these shafts.

He expected nothing else.

"Time will assuage grief," he said, "and banish terror. What use is there in grieving for one who is dead?"

"Ay, dead—murdered by you!" answered Emily, eying him boldly.

Howard shrugged his shoulders.

"You say so," he replied, "but I know better. Your sister's husband was never very sane, and I think the battle in which he and his friends were worsted turned his brain. If he chose to spring up in the boat and struggle with the men and fall overboard, whose fault is it but his own? You know that at any rate I gave no order for his murder. If any one concocted a plan against his life, it was Bernardo."

Emily turned her lovely eyes searchingly upon him, and even the bold bad man seemed to quail before the glance of those innocent and sorrowful orbs.

"Alas!" she said, "I know not what to believe. I thought that from you—an Englishman—we should have received protection. I little imagined that in your hands we are in more peril than ever. What have you done to restore us to our friends, as you promised?"

"Of what use is it to lie to you?" he said. "I have sent no message to Mrs. Harden's friends. I love her, and hope that some day she will be mine. Her husband is dead; priests are easily to be found in Italy who will tie this knot for me without delay or scruple. Once my wife, who is to tell that she did not willingly become so? But on your behalf, Mistress Emily, I have sent to those who will not even know that your sister is here."

Emily turned upon him with flashing eyes.

"And do you think I would be so base as to accept liberty and leave her?" she cried.

"Just as you please," he said. "You are pretty, and no doubt in due time there will be found one of my crew who would make you his wife. My favorite, Norman, has already told me how smitten he is by your youthful charms."

"Peace! say no more," cried Emily. "I wish not to listen to your insults. All I need say is that I will not leave this place until my sister comes also. I have great faith in her, and quite as great faith in myself. Sooner than do as you wish I know my sister would kill herself, and I am certain that I should. So, pray, do not speak to me as you have done. I only pray to Heaven that, in spite of all, help will come, and that you will be punished as you deserve for your villainy."

And as she uttered these words she thought of Jack—brave Jack—alone, as she deemed him, in the den of these old sea pirates, near at hand, listening to all that was said.

And, even though she knew not of the presence of other friends, she took courage from his being there, and spoke more boldly.

Howard was only amused at her words.

Why not? He was sole master there, and they were his captives.

And what on earth so remote as the chance of their being rescued!

So he only smiled.

"Your words are harsh," he said, "but time, which achieves such great things, will also achieve this—that you will be reconciled to your fate, and accept for good what you now think evil."

"Never!" said Emily, firmly.

"We shall see," returned the pirate. "However, that is not the thing of which I desire to speak. I am going a long journey."

"Thank Heaven!" was Emily's thought.

But she said nothing.

"During my absence you will be attended upon by the Greek girls who have already done that service. Everything is here which the invalid can desire—wine, fruit and delicate viands; and when I return I will bring with me a leach, who will act like a magician."

"I hope my sister will have escaped by that time," said Emily, "either through the influence of friends, or the kindly hand of death. Either would be more acceptable than life here."

"Ah, well!" said the half-English pirate, "I

need wait to hear no more. Time will serve to alter all these sentiments. Adieu! I leave you well guarded, so that all hopes of forcible escape had better at once be driven from your mind."

And with these hope-banishing words the tall pirate turned upon his heel.

He spoke a few rapid words to his men.

Two of them at once took up their stations on the bench by the fire close to their companion, whom they kicked into consciousness, and the others fled out of the cavern, Ralph going last.

Ere he quitted the place, he turned once more, and kissing his hand to Emily said:

"Farewell. When I return, understand that you and your pretty sister shall be mine."

The girl glanced at him mechanically.

In a few moments the cave was rid of the pirate leader and his four companions.

There now remained in the cavern the one whom they had roused from his drunken sleep, and who still remained with his head turned towards the fire, and the others who were intently watching the young girl and her sister, who had subsided into a feverish, fretful sleep.

What was to be done?

Emily knew not, but in her heart she felt that brave Jack Gale would prove more than a match for the three pirates in the struggle that must quickly ensue.

Jack was of course unable to grapple with three men.

And yet he was as utterly unable to remain long in his cramped-up position.

A sudden idea struck Emily.

Of course she would have been less cautious had she known that Ben Brace was outside and could be called at any moment by Tom Meadows.

And, on the other hand, Jack being unable from behind Lydia's bed of skins to see anything going on in the dimly-lighted cavern, was quite unaware of how many enemies he had to contend with, or he would have no doubt sprung up, and with his daring recklessness have chanced the encounter, and called Tom and Ben to his assistance.

But, as I have said, a sudden idea occurred to Emily, who could speak a little—though very little—Italian.

She quietly bent over the patient as if she had heard something which startled her, and then with a nervous gesture she rose from her low seat.

Approaching the Italian pirates, who were already smoking vigorously and partaking copiously of the fiery wine, she pointed towards her sister, making at the same time a gesture to indicate that she was very bad.

One of the men rose, saying:

"What does the signorina want?"

"One of the Greek maidens."

"Good!" he said, and he passed towards the mouth of the cave.

This left only the one, who was again becoming intoxicated, and the one who sat with his back to the bed of skins.

Neither of these were taking any notice of her.

Softly then she crept back to the side of her sister, and resumed her seat.

"Now, Jack," she said, in a low voice, "your English courage will be put to the test."

Jack eagerly obeyed.

Rising, he came to Emily's side, and tenderly pressed her hand.

"I know not what is to be done," he whispered in her ear; "perhaps it would be foolish to let myself be seen until I have discovered if there are means of escape. Wait one moment, and—ah! I am discovered!"

As he said these words he stood, sword in hand, ready for the attack.

The second pirate had turned his head in order to take another drink, and had seen Jack as he crouched by Emily's side.

"*Cospetto!*" he cried, as he drew a pistol from his girdle, "whom have we here? Julio, up and defend yourself—we are betrayed!"

And he sprang towards the startled pair.

Jack had by this time his pistol in his hand also.

"Stand back!" he said. "I warn you I am not alone. Tom—Tom, tell Ben he is wanted! We have the pirates upon us!"

Tom Meadows had through all this scene crouched in the darkness of the rocky crevice, like a faithful dog waiting for his master's word.

But when he did hear Jack's voice he leaped out into the cave.

"By Neptune!" he cried, "I cannot go to Ben. He'll be here quick enough when he hears the sound of fighting. Ah, you black rascal, take that!"

This was said to the first Italian, whose face was noticeable for its swarthy complexion, and who, aiming at Jack at a moment when there was no danger of striking Emily, caught him on the shoulder with a bullet.

Tom fired at the same moment, wounding the man in the arm.

Two more shots were fired indiscriminately again, and then the British lads and pirates sprang upon each other and engaged with swords.

"Crouch down by your sister's side, Emily," had been Jack's first injunction, "you will be of no good in this battle, but harm."

And so, crouching down with her hands clasped, the young girl watched the terrible scene, while Lydia, waking from her delirious sleep, gazed round her with stony horror; hearing the shots, the oaths, the clashing of weapons, but comprehending nothing.

Jack knew that at any moment other pirates might arrive.

And they did—all too soon.

Just as by desperate exertions Tom and Jack had succeeded in driving their adversaries back towards the mouth of the cave, three dark shadows fell on the wall, and three men entered hurriedly.

Jack's eyes glanced eagerly at them.

He had feared to see Howard.

In that case all would, of course, have been lost.

For, as a matter of certainty, the whole of the crew of the *Thunder* would have been at his call.

But this catastrophe was spared them.

It was not he.

Three stalwart fellows, however, they were, and on seeing how matters stood, they sprang upon our heroes with a cry of rage.

And well they might.

Their comrades displayed evident marks of blood, and were plainly getting the worst of it.

Tom and Jack fought with an enthusiasm which the Italians had never seen surpassed.

Their weapons appeared to flash and flame everywhere.

So, when the three fresh adversaries made their way into the cave, they dared not fire.

Their friends and their foes were too closely intermingled, and so, drawing their swords, they plunged eagerly into the fray.

It was now the time of Jack and Tom to act on the defensive.

They were brave as lions, as we know.

But then they were only striplings opposed to strong and mature men.

However, though they found themselves beaten back, they fought with a determination which was truly bewildering to their opponents.

One perplexing thought, however, passed through their minds.

Where was Ben Brace?

Surely he must have heard the shots?

Why, then, was he absent?

The idea was a very grave one.

It was suggestive, in fact, of utter discomfiture and defeat.

They felt sure, indeed, that had he heard the firing he would at once have rushed to the spot.

They well knew his dogged and resolute courage.

Was he absent then, or had anything occurred to him?

They certainly had heard no shots or sounds of conflict.

But then the sounds within had been so loud that they could not expect to have heard them.

They were, therefore, in an utter perplexity.

But not for long.

There was suddenly a rush of feet, and a dark figure came rushing in.

"That's right, Master Jack," cried Ben's well-known voice; "give 'em a broadside. I suppose you thought I'd struck my colors. Never fear. Ben never shows the white feather."

Of course this was not said connectedly, but in jerks, as he began to attack the enemy in the rear.

The diversion caused by the arrival of Ben Brace was great indeed.

One of the four pirates was gradually giving in, wounded desperately, and as he turned to glance at the new-comer, he failed to parry the stroke, and the sword of Tom Meadows flashed through his chest.

This one being disposed of, the battle was more even, three to four, and one of the latter slightly overcome still with his potations.

But this latter fact did not prevent him from being troublesome.

His lunges might be given at random, and therefore might be easily parried, but still, when three were engaged with three, it was perilous to have a man running round them, with a sharp sword in his hand, lunging here, there, and everywhere.

However, it was not long before he was disposed of.

He began "tickling up" Ben Brace, as he called it, and the old sailor, taking advantage of

a momentary pause in his own adversary's swift thrusts and parries, gave him "one for his nob," bringing his weapon down on his head with tremendous force, and sending him dead to the earth.

It was throughout a most terrible conflict for poor Emily to see.

But up to this moment her friends had held their own.

But could she hope that this would continue?

However, they never showed any signs of flagging.

Their weapons flashed about as sharply as ever.

The same light was in the eyes of the brave British tars.

They were in the very mood now which renders men triumphant.

They had already defeated some of their enemies, and their hearts were accordingly full of exultation at the prospect of further victory, and of being able, or at any rate have a chance, of rescuing the two girls from their perilous position.

It became now a resolute conflict; face to face, hand to hand, foot to foot, and blade to blade.

The cavern was only lit by two dim and smoking torches, stuck in niches, and by the light cast in from the large entrance.

However, by this they contrived to note each other's faces and actions, and they rarely missed their aim.

At length the superior strength, agility, and pluck of the British prevailed, and another of the Italians bit the dust.

This had the effect of staying the fight for a moment.

None of our heroes had any bloodthirsty intentions towards the pirates.

Much as they detested them for their villainies, much as they hated them as the means of keeping Emily and her unfortunate sister in the power of the ruffianly Ralph Howard, they had every wish to spare any further effusion of blood.

So Jack said—

"Of what use is further resistance? Surrender, and your lives are safe."

A loud roar of laughter was the reply, and one of the tallest of the pirates made a sudden lunge at Jack.

But it was the signal for his doom.

A shot fired by Ben Brace, who, up to now, had had no chance of using his pistols, penetrated his brain, and he fell dead.

It was a scene far too terrible for Emily.

A continued succession of deaths sickened her, and she buried her face in her hands.

Ever and anon, however, in the midst of the terrible hubbub, she was fascinated and compelled to glance round to see if the victory was going with her friends or her foes.

When she looked again, after a few minutes, she saw that but one Italian remained.

The others lay in a ghastly heap upon the floor of the cave, and the three Englishmen fronted him. He held in his hand a pistol.

This was his only weapon, for his dagger had been lost in the affray, and his sword was broken.

"Why do you not surrender?" said Jack. "We promise you the life for which you have fought so stoutly; nay, liberty, when we have saved yonder ladies. All we require is that you deliver up your pistol, and consent to be gagged and bound."

The man laughed hoarsely.

"Ha, ha!" he cried; "and are you so little conversant with the feelings of a sea rover as to think I will be thus captured, or rather, to yield myself thus a prisoner? No, no. When I first took service under the black flag I swore to die, if necessary, but never to be taken prisoner. So offer nothing more. Either you let me go free or I fight my way, or I yield to the fate which is common to us all sooner or later."

While he was speaking, Emily listened anxiously.

She could not understand every word he said, but she could tell pretty well the purport of them.

And doing so she was aware that in any fresh struggle he held the life of one of the three in his power, if his aim was true.

In her heart the question was

"Which one would it be?"

She respected all three.

She regarded them as what they were—brave, true-hearted friends.

But for Jack there was a stronger and a warmer feeling.

It was a feeling which she, no doubt, would have been unable to analyze.

But it was none the less the first dawning of real love.

It was towards him, therefore, that her earnest gaze was directed in this crisis.

"Seize him, but let us spare his life, if possible," cried Jack to his comrades. "Wretch though he is, I cannot kill him in cold blood."

The man, of course, understood not one word of English.

But he guessed the meaning of Jack's speech, and as the trio sprang forward he fired.

Had his aim been only an inch truer the story of our hero Jack need never have been written.

As it was it whizzed by his temple, and then the desperate man, catching up wildly one of the weapons of the dead, defended himself fiercely.

He seemed utterly regardless of blows.

All he appeared to desire before he died was to kill Jack.

He attacked him with a desperation like that of a wild beast, in spite of the wounds which he received, until Ben Brace, less merciful, or more prudent, perhaps, than our hero, and seeing that a chance thrust might settle Jack's account forever, ran the obstinate pirate through the body.

There was a pause.

Then Ben Brace spoke.

"Well," he said, "this is about as blood-thirsty an affair as I was ever in, or ever saw. I'm glad it's over, though it seems likely to me that it's only a beginning of a good deal more like it."

"I am afraid so too," said Jack. "But there is one thing which must be done at once, and that is, we must get rid of these bodies and do away with all the signs of a struggle, or we shall spoil all our hard-won victories."

"Yes, Master Jack," returned Ben Brace; "and I tell ye what we'd better do. It's no use being squeamish. We must take these 'ere bodies and fling 'em into the sea. It's the burial they'd have had if they'd been killed out in the middle of the ocean; and we mustn't run any risks now."

"You are right," said Jack. "Just one half minute, and I am ready."

And he ran over to Emily.

"Ah!" said Ben Brace to himself; "he's goin' to have a sip o' love, and I'm goin' to have a sip o' somethin' warmer; and that's rum. Here, Tom, take a drop."

Tom Meadows was nothing loath.

Nor indeed was Jack when he came back from Emily's side.

But in the unselfishness of his heart he thought of her feelings first.

"Emily," he said, as he knelt down by her and took her hand, which he pressed to his lips, "I hope you are not too frightened to be still brave, and ready at the moment."

"Oh, Jack!" she cried, falling on his shoulder, weeping, "how can I say that I am not frightened? I was terribly, awfully alarmed. The scene to me was naturally something hideous. I feel that many more such sights would turn my brain."

With an involuntary feeling, something that he could not help, he bent and kissed her lips.

She did not resent it.

"You will try and be brave for her sake and for mine?" he murmured.

"I will," she said. "What am I to do?"

"I cannot tell you yet," he answered. "All I wish now is, that you will remain quiet, and keep your poor sister quiet while we carry these bodies out and bury them. Then we must consult as to what is to be done."

"I will do all my best," said Emily, in as firm a tone as she could command. "Lydia is unconscious of it all. She has only been tossing to and fro in her sleep, that is all. Do not delay for me. I will not watch you, for fear my heart should once more fail me."

Again Jack kissed the trembling girl, pressed her little hand, and hastened to Ben's side.

He and Tom had just finished their rum.

"Little drop left for the commanding officer," said Ben, holding out the bottle.

Jack gladly drank a drop.

And then the dismal work began.

The one peril which they had anticipated seemed to be infinitely postponed.

They had expected of course that the Greek girls, who were supposed to be in attendance on Lydia, would make their appearance, and finding how matters stood, give the alarm to any other of the villainous crew who might chance to be on the island.

For the time this was apparently averted.

The man, no doubt, who by Emily's wish had gone in search of them, had either failed to find them, or had delayed.

At any rate, now was the time.

They must first carry all the dead bodies out into the open air, and hide them behind some rocky ledge; then they must remove as much as possible the traces of the fight, and then proceed to the burial.

They were not long in removing the five bodies. Laid side by side, just in the shadow of a great

ledge of rock by the sea-shore, with a belt of golden sunlight on one hand, and the sea rolling and lapping up almost to their feet, they looked indeed a solemn crew.

A horrid crew, too, with their rugged features and swarthy skins, with which their gay trappings of velvet and gold lace seemed to contrast mockingly.

Their terrible wounds and blood-stained clothes, hands, and faces, made them look all the more hideous.

"Thank Heaven we are safe and have saved these unfortunate girls for the moment from such a crew!" said Jack, as they made their way once more into the cave. "How we contrived to get the better of such a set of wretches surprises me."

"Ah, don't you know right is might, Master Jack?" said Ben. "But don't you have nothing to do with clearing up this place. I and Tom are more used to swabbing up decks than you. Tain't in your line. You stand at the entrance of the cave and keep a lookout."

Tom and Ben were not long at their dreadful work.

They obliterated all signs of the awful fight, and then they proceeded to bury the dead.

This was no easy matter.

The water was far too shallow to conceal them, and they possessed no boat to bear them out into deep water.

What then was to be done?

The only thing was to explore.

This was done by Ben Brace, and he soon found a piece of deep water surrounded by rocks, where, by wading out, they could contrive to sink the remains of the slain.

The difficulty was to keep them beneath the water when they were once there.

This, however, was surmounted by Ben Brace.

He filled all their pockets with the largest pebbles he could find, and then, untying their sword-bashes, he tied them round their necks, and fastened an immense stone to the other end.

Then one by one the bodies were committed to the deep in the little bay.

Jack knelt and said a prayer—a short but expressive one—and Tom and Ben stood by with uncovered heads.

It was a sad thing to see, a sad thing to think of, these men now lying silent and still in their ocean grave, after their life of iniquity, cut off in the very middle of their sin.

But our hero and his friends had not long to spend on such a task.

After the hurried prayer they cast aside their gloom, and once more set themselves to the task of thinking what was to be done.

Look round them as they would, they could see no sign of any boat.

Without one, what could they do?

The illness of Lydia precluded the idea of moving her, except into a boat at the very moment before they made their attempt of whatever kind it was.

"We seem as if we were in Queer Street again, Master Jack," said Ben, "and after that fight, I'm bothered if I don't wish I could find the larder. I feel as if I'd nothing to eat since I entered the service."

"Well," said Jack, "I feel sick and faint, too, though I can't say I am really hungry; but from all I see, I don't think we have much chance of getting anything except oysters and so forth, which only make us more hungry."

"How are the ladies provided for?" asked Tom.

"Pretty fairly at present, I believe," said Jack.

"They have some wine, some melons, some figs, some cold meat and bread, and—"

"Oh!" cried Ben, making a terrible grimace.

"Oh, please don't go on any further! I really can't bear it. Lord love their little hearts, I don't begrudge the ladies their food, if it was ever so much. But don't let's talk about it. Let's look out for some for ourselves."

Jack was nothing loath.

"First of all," he said, however, "I must tell Emily what to say in case we are away when Ralph and his men return."

They hastened back at once to the cave.

They found Emily much calmer, and Lydia in a heavy sleep.

Jack readily explained what he desired to be done.

If the pirates returned and desired to know what had become of their companions, she was to say nothing of what had happened.

She heard the sounds of quarreling and fighting, and being frightened, she hid herself until it was over, so she knew nothing about it.

Having arranged this, and partaken between them of a bottle of wine which had been left with Emily, and which she begged of them to accept, together with a little cream cheese and some bread, they started to make a tour of the island.

"It is a strange thing," said Jack, as they boldly climbed the rugged rocks to reach the summit of the cliffs, "where those Greek girls are. It is out of all reason that Ralph, feeling as he does towards Lydia, would leave her and her sister to the tender mercies of rough men."

"Well, it's a good job," said Ben Brace, "just this time. If they had come up just at the moment we were having that set-to, it might have spoiled it all."

They passed now over the face of the cliff, gradually getting higher and higher, until they could see all around them.

It was a bright and beautiful day, and they could command a view for miles and miles.

At this height it was easy to see their position.

The spot to which they had been driven by the storm was little more than a mass of rock jutting up from the sea.

It was of a jagged and uneven shape, and here and there only were there any signs of life.

A hut or a cottage (perhaps there were six on the whole island) could be seen at intervals, with a piece of cultivated ground showing up among great patches of emerald verdure.

Beyond the coast stretched the blue waters of the sea, and the islands of the Grecian Archipelago, shining white, bright and staring in the glaring sun.

But not a boat was to be seen.

"Now, then, what's the next thing?" asked Ben Brace. "We might as well be on Robinson Crusoe's island for all the chance we have of getting off. I don't see what we are to look forward to at all."

"Well, it does look hopeless," said Jack, as he glanced round him; "but we must have patience. That is the only thing that I can see."

"Patience is all very well," returned Ben Brace, "but a boat is better. There's one thing very certain. We can't make one out of them 'ere little shrubs. There don't seem a respectable tree in the whole blessed island."

"No, indeed," said Jack. "There doesn't even seem the material for a raft. But it's no use growling. Let's go on exploring."

They had scarcely proceeded for about a hundred yards further, when they came upon a hut, just behind a projecting piece of rock, which was deserted by its inmates, who were basking before it in the sun, fast asleep, on a sloping bank of green.

The secret of the cavern was now discovered.

The three Greek maidens—lovers, no doubt, of some of the pirates—were the sleepers.

Everywhere around them were evident signs of a carouse—wine-cups, broken and unbroken, lying about, bottles, plates, knives, fruit, bread, wine spilled—blood-red—upon the sandy shore.

"Ha, ha!" cried Ben Brace, a beaming smile overspreading his good-natured countenance, "ha, ha! I think I see now the chance of a feast."

"Surely you are not hungry enough to make another delay!" cried Jack.

"No, no!" exclaimed Ben Brace, "no, no! I only mean we can go on a foraging expedition to provide food for later on."

"Ay, ay!" said Jack; "all is fair in love and war! Let us begin."

They stepped towards the hut in as gentle and leisurely a manner as if they were walking on eggs.

The damsels slept on.

They were evidently utterly overcome by the carouse in which they and their companions had been indulging, and there appeared no danger of their waking.

So into the hut they went.

It was a neatly-built little place, with two rooms, one of which was evidently used as a store-room.

There was here an abundance of everything necessary for their comfort, and by means of baskets and so forth, they were soon enabled to carry off enough provisions to last them with care three or four days.

This done—without waking the three slumbering beauties—they hastened towards the cave which they had made their head-quarters, and concealed the things as well as they could.

Then they paid another visit to Emily and her sister, and having explained how things had gone, they started again to explore the other part of the island.

They found little but disappointment.

The part which they were now going over was even more rugged and uninhabited than the other part of the place, and no sign of any boat or materials for making one, or even a raft, could be seen.

It was dark when they made their way back towards the cavern.

They had seen no sign of any vessels making for the island during the evening.

Several had passed along in the distance, and faded away beyond the horizon.

But no sign was there of the *Wolf of the Waves*, the *Vulture*, or the *Thunder*.

At length, however, when they were within half a mile of the cave, and darkness had fallen about an hour, they were startled by the unmistakable sound of guns.

Boom—boom—boom!

The sound came rolling dismally over the waves, telling of death and destruction.

The ships which were engaged were so near that they could see the flashes of the cannon.

"Well, how can this have happened?" cried Jack. "How is it they can be so near when we did not see them approach?"

"The rock yonder hid them," said Ben Brace. "You see, it was in front of us all the way. Let us stand here and watch them. Who knows that we mayn't have an interest in this battle?"

They remained accordingly.

More than an hour the conflict raged.

They could, of course, tell nothing as to the result of the affair as it went on, for the combat was being waged at far too great a distance; but still the mere fact of the fight kept them spell-bound with a strange fascination.

Presently the end came.

They could see by the lights that the vessels had separated, and while they were cogitating upon the meaning of this, there was a sudden and terrific roar, the sea was lit up by a tremendous explosion, and they saw a large vessel, with all sails set, plunging onward madly towards the island.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH RALPH THE AVENGER SAILS ON A STRANGE JOURNEY.

WHEN Ralph Howard left the cave and its occupants, and sailed away once more over the waves of the deep blue sea, he had a deep object in view.

In fact, he had more than one object before him.

He guessed that Leoni would not be far behind him, and that, enraged beyond measure by the escape of his prisoners and the treachery of Bernardo, he would hasten to every spot where it was likely they would have a chance of meeting.

But he had another design before him.

On one of the islands, which, at the time of the French war, were perfect nests of freebooters, there was an old ruin overlooking a bay, which had been utilized long since as the head-quarters of Leoni and his crew.

Here they lived when they were not careering across the billows of the restless ocean on their wild and lawless adventures.

Chief among those who were residents in this spot to look after the hidden treasures and watch the approach of friends and enemies, was a man named Hugh Brandon—an Englishman—a fellow who, though a pirate, had some little of the milk of human kindness left in him, and was often left out in the most reckless and bloodthirsty of Leoni's plans.

He was a man to be depended on, however, and it was to this person that Ralph Howard hastened when he left the pirates' isle.

On one occasion Ralph had saved this fellow's life, and in spite of his belonging to a rival crew, he had resolved, if possible, to enlist his services in a strange and secret mission.

Brandon was the outcast son of a good family, and he was the best person whom Ralph could have selected for his purpose; one who, despite his lawless life, could readily return into society, provided money was given him for the purpose.

Ralph's idea was indeed a strange one.

He had become so utterly infatuated by the beauty of Lydia Harden, that for her sake he intended to abandon the desperate and dangerous life he was leading.

Rightly thinking that Lydia would be safer and happier in her own country, he had resolved to send Hugh Brandon to England to negotiate for the purchase of a small estate, so that he could at once suggest to Lydia the propriety of returning to her own country and her own friends, as his wife, of course.

His own infatuation made him believe that she would consent to be his bride when she was certain of her husband's death, and he had waited a decent time before urging his suit.

Of course he imagined that Lydia knew him not as the fierce and desperate pirate he was, but only as the privateer he would represent himself to be; as the destroyer of Leoni, as he intended to be, and the avenger of her husband's wrongs; as the private English gentleman, renouncing the

sea and its wild attractions, he hoped to be able at last to cast down the barrier between them.

In this matter he hoped to secure the aid of Emily, whom he trusted to win to his side by every show of kindness and consideration he could bestow upon her; and with this idea in his mind he was quite content to delay.

He had set himself some difficult tasks then.

He must win Hugh Brandon's confidence; seize upon the treasure stored up by Leoni in the ruined fort on the island; slay the pirate Leoni himself; and by fire and sword destroy all who stood in his path.

Once his intentions were fulfilled Ralph Howard felt that he could throw himself at Lydia's feet, and claim love and compassionate gratitude at her hands.

Vain hopes! He little knew her heart.

Little knew the strength of her devotion to her unfortunate husband.

The bright sun was pouring an unusual flood of glory upon the island of Latrina, as the *Thunder* approached it.

The old fort standing, white and glaring, on the summit of the high rocks above the bay, formed a conspicuous object among the intense greenery round it.

Not a sign of life was visible in or around it.

Not even the ghost of a flag fluttered from its battlements.

The little place where Hugh Brandon, the treasure-keeper, resided, was not far distant from the ruin, and it was too small to be seen from the ship's deck.

It was only a small tenement built up out of old bricks and bowlders, and so forth, but it was strong and warm, and had stood the brunt of many a storm.

Hugh Brandon himself was standing on the edge of a high cliff when the *Thunder* first appeared, making its way over the white-crested waves towards the bay.

He was a man not more than fifty; his locks were grizzled, and his face bronzed, but he had an air about him as if he had at one time or another moved in far different society to that which now fell to his lot among the wild and desperate pirates of the Mediterranean.

He raised his sea-glass to his eye as he saw the vessel approaching.

"It looks like the *Wolf of the Waves*, and yet I don't know," he said. "My eyes are not getting dim, I hope. There's something about her trim that's different. Ha! she's signaling. What's that?"

He gazed eagerly now.

The *Thunder* was certainly signaling.

"Is all well?" muttered Hugh Brandon, as he read off the signal. "That's Leoni's signal, and yet I could swear that that is not the *Wolf of the Waves* now that she is nearer. However, there she anchors, and I must answer."

With these words he hastened down quickly in the direction of the ruined fort.

The fort was squarish built, and nearly three whole walls still remained.

The inner part—the rooms where the soldiers of the garrison had once lived—were in a state of utter ruin and confusion.

Where once there had been a guard-room, and the little rooms where they took observations of any enemy that might be approaching the bay, you had to stumble over great heaps of rubbish and debris of wood and stone and chalk.

Two guns had been left by the Greeks when they abandoned the place, under the delusion that they were rusty and useless, but these had been oiled and cleaned by the pirates, and the rubbish round them having been cleared away, they had placed in position, and thus commanded the bay.

It was in the basement, beneath all the rubbish and debris, that the treasures of the murdering pirates lay hidden.

In an obscure corner, covered, and, in fact, crammed apparently with rubbish, there was an opening, a kind of trap-door, leading down to the place where the stores of the fort had at one time been kept.

Here it was that Leoni and his men had piled up their bags of gold, their diamond crosses, their rich arms. Here they concealed all evidences of their terrible crimes.

What numberless knick-knacks there were, valueless in themselves, but able to tell a tale of woe and desolation to many a loving heart.

Little rings and crosses, and bundles of letters, and handkerchiefs with names woven upon them; lockets, chains, and seals, initialed in *memoriam*.

What cared the ruffian crew for all this?

They simply piled these little relics with the others, to be disposed of when possible, and thought no more of them or the murdered owners.

As Hugh Brandon went to the fort, he glanced on either side of him cautiously, as if afraid, even in that semi-deserted place, that his movements would be observed.

But there was no one about.

A little group had gathered on the sun-lit shore, a short distance off, to look at the ship as it lay in the offing; but they were only fishermen, and would take no notice of the simple signal which would be run up to the top of the deserted flag-staff.

In a few moments a long red strip of silk was fluttering in the gentle breeze; then it was lowered twice, and finally run down.

The signal meant "All's well."

"Coming ashore," signalled Ralph Howard; and Hugh Brandon at once hurried towards the beach, making his way down by descending some irregular steps, partially natural, and partially cut out of the rocks.

On the beach was drawn up a large boat, but he did not push it off.

He waited to see what was going on on board the ship.

For even now Hugh Brandon had his doubts.

As we have before seen, Howard's ship was known as the double of the *Wolf of the Waves*, and it was difficult for the keenest observer to note any difference.

But still Hugh's mind was in a state of uncertainty, and he resolved not to be precipitate.

Directly the ship had anchored in the bay, the boats were lowered and manned, and were quickly pulled towards the shore.

Hugh, with his sea-glass, could see Ralph Howard in the stern-sheets.

But he did not recognize him.

Of course, he saw at once that he was not Leoni.

As it was not Leoni, how came it that the signals had been given correctly?

However, his doubts were soon allayed.

Ralph was the first to leap ashore.

Hugh recognized him then instantly.

He knew at once that grand head, that stalwart form, and he held out his hand.

"Ah, Howard," he cried, "my preserver, we meet again then at last!"

"Yes," said the pirate, smiling, glad to find Brandon in such a humor, "I am here; and we do not meet by accident."

"Indeed?"

"No; I came here to see you on business."

"Where is Leoni?"

"I know not," said Howard, who never unnecessarily dissembled. "I wish I did. He and I have some scores to settle to the death, and the sooner we meet the better I shall like it. But where can we speak alone? Is any one up at your hut?"

"No one save my dog," said the other. "But tell me how it is that you know so much of this place and my affairs? You surprise me."

"I shall surprise you more yet," said Ralph Howard. "But see, my men are landed now, and I do not desire that they should hear our conversation. Let us go up the mountain-path, and in a few words I can explain all."

Briefly, Howard explained all his views.

Hugh Brandon heard him to the end; but then, turning towards him with a sarcastic smile, he said:

"So, because you saved my life, you wish me to give you in exchange my honor."

Howard laughed loudly.

"Brave sentiments for a pirate," he said, "whose hand is against every man. Come, explain yourself."

"I will," said Hugh Brandon, with a strange kind of pride. "You once saved my life when you were out on the wild sea, and there was no one near to help me—all alone, tied to that piece of wreck—and in return for that service, you wish to make me a common thief. A pirate is one thing, a common thief another."

Howard's face flushed.

"You insult me," he said. "You know that no matter what I am, my blood is noble. I am a free rover of the seas, and I take what I find, after fierce struggles and risking of lives. But you have no right to tell me that I ask you to be a common thief."

"You do. I am left in charge here by Leoni, and to do as you ask—to show you the way to the secret treasure-chamber—would be to act as a coward and a dastard. No, I refuse."

"And my commission to England?"

"That is different," said Hugh. "I accept that."

"Then by St. Paul!" roared Ralph Howard, as he drew his mighty sword and swung it round his head, "I'll give ye no chance to accept it. I'll grasp the pirate Leoni's treasure while you are a dead man at the bottom of the sea and the fishes are swimming round ye, and preparing for their feast."

Hugh was unarmed.

He folded his arms, and gazed undaunted in the pirate's face.

"Strike!" he said. "You gave the life you wish to take. It is yours. I fear you not. I am of English birth."

Ralph turned away.

"Bah!" he said, "it is not worth my while. If you will not show me the way, I will find it."

He turned abruptly away.

He respected a brave man, and could not in cold blood take this man's life.

Descending the steps a short distance, he beckoned to some of his men.

"Bring me two barrels of powder," he said, as they hastened to his side. "Quickly."

The men asked no questions.

Ralph was all-powerful with his own men.

No one ever dreamed of questioning his commands.

Within an amazingly short space of time the men returned, bringing with them the desired explosives.

Without a word to Hugh Brandon, without answering his eager demands, Ralph led the way to the ruined fort.

Although he knew nothing of the exact spot where a descent to the underground chambers could be made, he was pretty fairly aware of the position of affairs, and gave immediate directions where the powder was to be placed.

The kegs were broached, and stones piled on the powder and round it, so as to force the explosion as far as possible downwards; and then, a train being laid, a fuse was placed in proper position, and all retired to a safe distance.

Hugh Brandon followed Ralph eagerly.

Was he acting wrongly?

The treasures were not the real property of Leoni.

He himself was a pirate, and the friend of pirates.

Was he not doing an unnecessary act in attempting single-handed to prevent the plundering of the treasure-rooms?

Again and again he attempted to address Ralph; but the latter would not listen to him.

"No after-thoughts," he cried, laughing, for the old evil spirit was surging through him again now, and he was in his element. "Watch and see how I reopen Leoni's gold cupboard with my private key. Ha, ha! boys, there it goes! See how the old masonry goes toppling over the cliffs. There will be cracked crowns below there if any one is chancing to be walking. See how the flames shoot upwards. Ha, Hugh Brandon, you see now how easy it would have been to save yourself from a suspicion of treachery."

As he was speaking, the old fort was blown into a hundred fragments.

The white stone walls were hurled over upon the beach below; the roar of flame, and black smoke, and stones, and timber, went up toward the sunlit sky, and the ground at the summit of the staircase leading down to the treasure-room was rent asunder in many places.

Hugh Brandon knew that he had failed.

He saw that he had miscalculated the strength of Ralph Howard's character, and he stood silently by while the impatient pirates waited until all danger was past.

Then he followed them curiously, to see what was about to be done.

The powder had had its effect.

The top of the staircase had been blown right in, and it was without any difficulty that they were enabled to descend to the treasure-chambers.

Hugh saw them return presently with sacks of treasure; saw the pirates go staggering down the stone cliffs; saw them enter the boats and push off towards the ship.

Ralph remained till the last, giving orders.

Hugh again and again tried to speak, but the pirate chief prevented him.

"I wish for no further speech with you," he said, sternly. "You acknowledge that I gave you life. You now refuse to give me what is better—peace, happiness, and respect, maybe, in the future. I ask you to aid me in sinking the name and calling of a pirate in the deep abyss of the sea, and you refuse. Adieu!"

And leaping into the last boat, he bade his men push off.

But Hugh Brandon's mind was made up.

Insensibly he was drawing a chain more tightly round Lydia and Emily, whom he knew not.

With a wild cry he leaped into the waves, and waded out.

"Take me with you, Howard," he said. "I will go to England and perform your mission. I cannot remain here to brave Leoni and his cut-throat vengeance."

Howard laughed loudly, and bade his men rest on their oars.

Hugh Brandon waded out, and the giant pirate helped him into the boat.

"You might have saved yourself a wet jacket, Brandon," he said, as they once more pulled towards the ship. "I thought those powder-kegs would bring you to your senses."

It was but a quarter of an hour now before they had reached the *Thunder*, and laden with treasure the ship went out to sea.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO SEA-DOGS.

It was about the hour of four in the afternoon, when Ralph, the Avenger, was reclining on a couch in the splendid cabin of the *Thunder*, thinking with delight of the events of the last few days.

He had succeeded beyond his utmost expectations.

Often in his softer moments he had thought how delicious it would be to leave his desperate life, and sail away to the quiet island home, England, to which he was linked by the blood which had flowed in his father's veins.

And now that he had succeeded in winning to his side Hugh Brandon, about the only one whom under such circumstances he could trust, he felt quite easy as to the future.

He was too vain to think of denial from any one.

With his handsome face and form, his power to command, his grandeur in victory, his calm resolution in defeat, he had won the hearts of his men, and knew that while he lived he was king of the seas.

And, knowing this, he never for one moment imagined that he could be refused by Lydia.

Here was his mistake.

Descended as he might be from the best blood in England, he yet lacked one thing.

He did not understand the delicacy of feeling which rules the ladies of this island.

He had seen her husband, as he imagined, hurled to his death; he had seen the link severed, and to his mind it seemed right that she should consent to be his wife.

Had he not wealth to offer her?

Had he not—if Hugh Brandon was true—a trusty messenger who would purchase for him a beautiful English home?

And could he not persuade her then that he was an English nobleman, who had fled from his country in anger, and had sworn never to return to the home of his ancestors until he had met Lydia?

He had found other women amenable to flattery.

Why could not she be also?

These thoughts, born of his own vanity, were interrupted suddenly by the entrance of Hugh Brandon.

The latter had to a great extent changed his character in a few hours.

"Captain Ralph," he said, "a word with you."

Ralph smiled.

"Why, Brandon," he cried, "what is the matter with you? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Nay, no ghost," said Hugh, laughing, "unless it be the ghost of my own thoughts."

"Tell them then."

"Simply this. You have given me a commission, and I wish to prove myself worthy of it," said Brandon. "I do not wish to walk the deck of this ship as some one whom no one knows. They scoff me because I am an Englishman, and they are Italians or half-breeds."

Ralph sprang to his feet.

"Sdeath!" he cried, drawing his huge sword, and waving it round his head in his usual impetuous style, "say you so? My crew insult me! Dare they insult one who is the friend of their captain? By St. Peter, they will rue it. Follow me."

Hugh Brandon had no desire to create in the vessel any enmity against himself.

As far as such a man could be a friend, he was a friend to Ralph the Avenger, and Ralph was a friend to him.

But there was no holding Ralph back when once he was determined.

And so, still sword in hand, he rushed from his cabin, and leaped up towards the deck.

"Ho, there, Giulio!" he cried, addressing the lieutenant; "what means all this? Who is master on board the *Thunder*?—you or I?"

Giulio smiled.

But though it was meant to soften the captain's resentment, and put him off his guard, it signally failed.

Ralph's eyes were fixed upon him searchingly, but he did not interrupt him.

"Why ask the question, *capitano*?" he said.

An oath, and a heavy one, too, escaped the lips of Ralph Howard.

"Because I do," he said. "Who is master, you or I?"

There were many of the crew about.

Giulio, after Ralph Howard, had always held a front position, and with the brutal perversity of men brought up in crime, the men calmly waited to see who was victorious.

With few of them, however, was there a doubt. Ralph was to them the one thing invincible.

But Giulio reigned next to Ralph, and he did not desire to be humiliated among his fellows.

He placed himself in a kind of antagonistic posture.

"Well," he said, "I don't know who is master. You are when you choose to be, but when I am on deck, and you away, I am master."

This insolence was enough for Ralph.

He leaped forward.

"Mutinous ruffian!" he cried, "you shall not beard me on my own deck. You shall die!"

And he raised his sword to cut him down.

But Giulio was not the man to be awed thus quietly.

"Ha, ha!" he cried, with an insolent laugh, "you think to crow over us because you have English blood in your veins. The English are not everybody, if you do think England the queen of the seas. Most of this crew are Italians, and—"

A dark figure suddenly rushed between the daring speaker and the captain, who would have struck him down.

"Hold here!" cried Hugh Brandon, for it was he who dashed forward. "Hold! Let this be my quarrel. By Neptune! I haven't sharpened my sword for ages. Why should our captain here fight his own officer? Your act is mutiny. But you can have a taste of English quality without disturbing the captain; take that!"

And, as he spoke, he struck the Italian full in the face with his clenched fist.

Ralph would have interfered, but Hugh Brandon waved him back.

"No, no, captain!" he said, "this man requires a lesson, which I can give him without the commander of the vessel being troubled about it. All I ask is this—if I fall, throw me overboard as a worthless dog for being thrashed by an Italian. If I win, let me be the lieutenant of the *Thunder* until such time as you require my services elsewhere."

During this calm and quiet speech the Italian, Giulio, had made some desperate efforts to attack Hugh Brandon in revenge for the blow which he had given him in the face.

But in vain.

The Englishman held his sword in such a manner as to make any sudden attack impossible.

"Be it as you like, Hugh," said the giant pirate, as he leaned against the mast; "settle it quickly though, for I have need of you."

This was enough.

Both men only wanted the word for action.

They were anxious for it, for the very devilment of the thing; and Brandon, having once thrown in his lot with Ralph, was eager to display his prowess in his cause.

It was a strange scene.

Everything, except the two men who were about to engage in a mortal struggle, was wondrously still, as it is generally out on the waters of the blue Mediterranean.

The ship was sailing onwards calmly.

The men were stationary at their posts, or leaning against the bulwarks; the sails flapped ever and anon for want of wind; the flag drooped now, and now again roused itself to a feeble flutter.

All so still and calm, save Giulio and Hugh, standing eying each other, as if they had been long and deadly enemies, with their swords drawn, and every nerve braced for the combat.

No one dreamed of interfering.

"There is honor among thieves," they say, and certainly among those pirates of old such a thing as spoiling such a duel would never have been dreamed of.

Ralph, who had cast aside all his enmity in his anticipation of the duel, calmly looked on, and uttered an exclamation of approbation as the two finally crossed swords and began real operations.

The styles of the two combatants were entirely different.

The Italian was full of dash and fury; Hugh Brandon was calm and deliberate.

Giulio was younger by many years than Hugh, and thought to beat him by violent dashes, and the most unheard-of passes and whirling about of his weapon.

But Hugh, with an eye like a hawk, and a resolute insensibility to danger, which was a problem to the Italians, remained still and calm, watching every move of his adversary, but making no effort at brilliant moves of his own.

He knew, however, as well as every one else on deck, that it was a duel to the death.

They did not do things by halves, these old sea pirates.

In love and war they were all the same—desperate and resolute.

They knew that in a few minutes, perhaps, the body of one of them would be flung over into the still blue waters, which had been the tomb of so many brave hearts before them.

The swords writhed and flashed together merrily in the sunlight.

Calmly, but with stern faces, every one looked on.

What to any one the rewas the loss of a life or two?

What mattered it to them if one more atom was wrenched from its position in the great immensity of the universe?

Clash!—clash!—chink!—chink!

It was merry music to those reckless men.

As every blow was given or taken with more or less effect, a ringing cheer rang over the deck of the pirate ship.

It was evident to all, however, from the first, that Hugh Brandon was the best swordsman, and with his calmness and deliberation was most likely to win the day.

Giulio at length grew mad with rage.

Young and full of spirit, as he was, it infuriated him to think that a staid and stolid Englishman, of fifty years, could get the best of him.

Losing his temper thus, the young Italian lost control over his sword too, and rushed furiously upon his adversary.

But Hugh was prepared for him.

As his adversary grew more desperate, so did he.

They left their standing by the mast, and flew hither and thither on the deck.

Crash—chink! chink—clash! here, there, everywhere; both swords gleaming rapidly in the light of the golden sun.

And then, at last, came the end.

Giulio, in his impetuous haste, slightly stumbled.

That was enough for Hugh.

In a moment he took advantage of the mistake, and dashing aside his adversary's sword, he plunged his weapon clean through Giulio's heart.

With a groan and one upturning of the eyes, the Italian fell on the deck—dead!

Hugh Brandon bowed to Ralph the Avenger, wiped his sword, and returned it to its scabbard.

"Captaid," he said, "I now claim your promise."

"And right gladly will I grant it," cried Ralph, who was by no means sorry at the end of the adventure. "Sailors of the *Thunder*, hear me. This has been a fair fight—fought well and bravely. Hugh Brandon is my lieutenant now. Let no man gainsay him, for he is my friend, and will be yours if you let him. Throw that carcass overboard, and—Pietro" (addressing the black steward), "let every man be served with an extra glass of grog to drink success to the living."

And so he passed down to his cabin, leaving his men to fling the body of Giulio overboard without even a prayer, while they drank greedily the health of the conqueror.

For a long time, as the *Thunder* sailed onwards gently, after the tragedy which had so little effect upon those hardened hearts, Ralph the Avenger remained undisturbed in his cabin.

He was buried in a delicious dream of the future—a future when Lydia would be restored to health and strength, and would smile upon his suit—when a step was heard coming down the companion-ladder, and a voice cried:

"Can I come in, captain?"

"Yes, yes," said Ralph, somewhat nettled at the interruption; "what is it, Hugh?"

"A sail, captain," cried Hugh, the new lieutenant; "and to my fancy a rather large one."

Ralph immediately sprang to his feet, took his glass, and went on deck.

He made out a vessel at some considerable distance.

"What do you make her out to be?" he said, turning to one of the experienced old sailors.

"Well, she looks very much like a very heavily-laden brig," replied the man.

"Clap on every inch of canvas, boys," shouted Ralph, "and let us get up to her."

The captain then went up to the maintop to make a careful survey of the stranger, and to convince himself that it was not either an English or a French man-of-war playing him some trick.

The pirate vessel, as was its wont, sailed with extraordinary rapidity, and within forty minutes they could almost see the deck of the other vessel.

"What do you think of her now, Hugh?" said

the captain, as he once more descended and leaned over the bow.

"I am not quite certain," he replied; "it looks to me very much as if she was shamming."

At this moment Mr. Norman stepped up to the pirate, touched his hat in a respectful manner, and said:

"I think, captain, I've seen those topsails before."

The lieutenant, on hearing this, turned round sharply.

"I think so, too," he said; "we must beware."

"Never mind," cried Ralph; "hoist the black flag, and let them see what metal they have to deal with."

The order had not been given two minutes when a long strip of canvas that had been hung over the gunwale disappeared as if by magic, and another black flag came fluttering up in the evening breeze.

Ralph was for the moment overwhelmed with astonishment.

He had been in many a tussle on the ocean before, but this trick was certainly a novelty to him.

However, Ralph proved himself equal to the occasion.

He was not a man to be taken aback by adverse circumstances.

"Beat to quarters!" he cried.

And the roll of the drum had scarcely been heard by the men, when an echo appeared to come from the other vessel.

Ralph the Avenger scanned the enemy carefully a moment.

"Do you think you could knock away her top-hammer?" he said.

"I will try," said Hugh, kneeling down and carefully taking aim.

He fired, and the foremast came down with a run.

The ball had cut the shrouds in two.

A broadside immediately followed from the other vessel.

"The man who commands yonder knows his business," said Ralph. "Ready about there, lads."

The men rushed to the ropes, and obeyed the captain's order, without quite understanding his motive.

As soon as she was in stays the lieutenant ventured to ask why he had done this unusual thing.

"Rake her aft!" was the captain's answer, "and let us fight bravely, lads, for we have a fighting enemy to cope with. We will give no quarter."

And when his orders were obeyed, and they ran under her stern, Ralph saw that his suspicions were correct.

She was the *Wolf of the Waves*.

Was Leoni the pirate following him for revenge?

If so, he most assuredly knew what must be the result?

It was war to the knife—life for life.

On the quarter-deck stood a tall and commanding figure.

A well-known and handsome form.

Leoni himself—calm, expectant, triumphant.

"Ah, Norman!" cried Ralph, "no wonder that you said you knew the topsails of yonder vessel. It is the *Wolf of the Waves*, and my foe, Leoni himself, is in command."

He gave one glance round him as if to gather from his men's faces what they thought of the encounter.

He saw nothing in their appearance to disappoint him.

Their features were resolute.

They were stanch and true to him to the death.

Again he gave an order to have the sails shifted, so that they were both brought side by side.

There was no necessity for grappling irons, and both were determined to fight the battle to the death.

"Hurrah! follow me, lads."

The first to leap upon the deck of the *Wolf of the Waves* was Ralph the Avenger, and he and Leoni stood for a moment face to face, sword in hand, gazing fiercely into each other's eyes.

The battle ceased for a moment.

"Ah! rascal," cried Ralph, "we meet again, Leoni. You were in search of me?"

"Ay," said Leoni, "I was; and you know what to expect from me, so look to thyself, thou half-English dog."

Ralph laughed loudly.

"Expect from you!" he said. "Leoni, boasts are of no avail. The half-English dog, as you term me, will have your life. Your doom is near!"

Leoni could repress his rage no longer, and

with a cry of fury he sprang forward upon his pirate foe.

THERE was now a general attack, and the rush of men for the moment separated the captains.

The men, armed with the first weapon they could seize—knife, pistol, gun—attacked each other with the fury of bull-dogs.

The numbers were pretty equal on both sides. It was simply a question of physical force.

They were all brave, with the usual bravery of pirates fighting for their lives.

Ralph's men were a few less in number than their adversaries, but the great prowess of their leader soon had its effect.

The crew of the *Wolf of the Waves* fell back, some towards the fore-castle, some towards the quarter-deck, and it appeared to Leoni that unless some extraordinary effort was made he must lose the day.

He ordered some of his men up the rigging, to fire at the foes beneath.

As he expected, this drew off their attention for a moment or two.

Still Ralph persevered.

He had every faith in his men, and as he glanced round him he saw nothing but resolution depicted on their faces.

The sailors of the *Thunder*, led by Ralph and Hugh, gradually made their way from the waist fore and aft, driving their enemies before them everywhere.

The decks became slippery with blood.

To any one else but those who had looked upon such scenes so often, it would have been insufferably horrible.

But to Ralph and Leoni it was but the recapitulation of things that had gone before.

Presently Leoni stood again face to face with his foe.

Their swords crossed at last.

It was the first time in their lives.

They had always been deadly foes, but never had they stood face to face in mortal combat.

They uttered no words, but their looks of hate meant death.

Their weapons flashed about like living things, and both being good swordsmen, many a wound was given and received.

The battle was not a long one.

Leoni's star seemed to have set for the time.

He had to retreat gradually before Ralph, and at length, in the midst of a rush of his men, he disappeared.

But he had not fled for fear of his adversary. He was resolved on a more terrible thing still than effecting his immediate death.

If he failed—if ruin was hurled at his head by the man who had so unaccountably escaped from the brigand's cave—he would see that there should be an awful retribution.

Dashing down into the hold of the vessel, he made his way towards the powder-magazine.

Here he knelt down, quietly and calmly, in spite of the din overhead, and forcing open a small bag of powder, began to make a train along the floor.

Then he made several trains to connect one barrel with another, and placing a long fuse near the end of the train, he left it.

The battle still went on raging.

But the tide was going with Ralph the Avenger.

Fortune had evidently declared for him, and even in the coming darkness he could see the faces of his men lit up with savage triumph.

And little by little the crew of the *Thunder* pressed their foes into corners, where they were almost helpless, and where, becoming panicky, some leaped over the bulwarks into the sea.

Leoni's sudden disappearance had surprised Ralph.

He concluded that he had fallen a victim to the battle.

But presently a man came rushing up to Ralph.

"Leoni has fired the powder-magazine," he cried; "the fuse is alight, and in a few moments the whole ship will blow up."

"Let it blow up," cried Ralph; "we needn't go with it. Let the signal be given to leave the vessel as swiftly as possible. Leoni, if still lives, will be caught in his own trap."

Ralph's orders were obeyed with the swiftness of lightning.

In a few minutes the men had made their way with wonderful precision on board the *Thunder*, and the two ships were about to disconnect, when a strange incident occurred.

A loud and piercing cry for help was heard.

Ralph and his men paused for a moment to listen.

Again the cry.

"Run down, Hugh," he cried; "but remember for your own sake not to delay."

Hugh was not long gone.

Then he returned, bringing with him a most familiar form.

That of Alfieri, the priest, who had conducted Jack Gale to the brigand retreat in the early part of this story.

Hugh, on going down below, had found him bound to a beam, begging in most piteous terms to be released.

The new lieutenant had lost no time in obeying his behests.

Undoing the ropes quickly, he helped him up on deck, and before waiting to ask any questions, Ralph Howard at once gave orders to sheer off, and make all sail.

They were only just in time.

As they were moving off, there was a terrific explosion, and the *Wolf of the Waves*, in one tremendous glow and sheet of flames, was hurled heavenwards in a thousand pieces.

It was in this light that Jack and his companions saw the *Thunder* coming on with all sail set towards the island.

CHAPTER XXII.

ALFIERI, THE PRIEST, AS AN ALLY ONCE MORE.

"WELL," said Ben Brace, as, standing on the shore of the island, they saw the approach of the pirate ship, her swelling canvas bearing her onward swiftly towards them, "what are we to do now?"

"I suppose we must await the landing of the crew and see what they require," said Jack. "I only hope they may give us a berth for the two ladies. If they did that I could be content to remain here and take my chance, if there was no room for us also."

"No fear of that, if they are the right sort at all," said Ben Brace; "but we've got to find what kind o' vessel she is yet. She seems to me strangely familiar."

"So she does to me," said Tom Meadows.

"Well," cried Jack, "so she does to me. What do you suspect?"

"That she is none other than the pirate ship the *Wolf of the Waves*, or the *Thunder*, said Ben Brace.

"And if she is—what shall we do then?" said Jack Gale.

"The best we can," laughed Ben. "It's no good meeting troubles half-way. All we can do is to go back to our hiding-place and await the course of events."

This was hardly consonant with Jack's notions. But still he could not for the moment suggest any other idea.

Never before had they been in so helpless a position.

If they had been away upon some uninhabited island in the far-off Pacific they could not have been so utterly beyond the ken of friends as they were now upon this little rock in the Grecian Archipelago.

The only thing, therefore, was to be patient, as Ben Brace had said.

How difficult, however, it was to be patient at all!

"Well," said Jack, in reply to Ben's calm and laughing remark, "it is all very well to talk about awaiting the course of events, but it isn't every one who can bear to do so. However, there's no use in grumbling. We must do our best and put up with the consequences."

Conversing thus they made their way in the direction of the cave.

On their way, of course, they kept a good lookout at sea.

But they could see very little.

The stars truly were out.

But the moon was obscured, and it was very difficult to see more than a few yards, as it were, out over the ocean.

Still they could trace the course of the ship by the red light dancing over the waves.

This they could still distinguish when they had reached the entrance of the cave.

Leaving Ben Brace and Tom Meadows to keep guard here, Jack entered the cavern where Lydia and Emily still were.

The cavern was now dimly lighted by a couple of torches.

The maidens had at length awoke, and brought light and refreshment.

They knew nothing of the combat.

They thought it strange, of course, that the two captives should be left alone.

But they took no notice.

In fact it was a matter of no interest to them. They only looked upon the two girls as curiosities, and as such were amused by them.

Emily's heart beat now with excitement as she heard of the expected arrival of the pirates.

Lydia was rapidly getting better.

Even the few hours' quiet which she had had,

had done her good, and though her mind still continued to be confused and unable to receive impressions, she was able to move to and fro.

This fact, though, of course, it was a good thing in the event of a chance of escape occurring, was bad in another way.

It might give Ralph a chance of renewing his hateful attentions.

This Emily suggested.

But Jack did not look upon it in this way.

He was delighted.

"You give me great hope now," he said.

"How is that?" said Emily.

"In regard to your sister's ability to walk."

"That seems a danger to me in the face of the return of these men."

"It is quite the reverse, I fancy," said Jack, "if only it happens as I wish. We shall search for a boat; and, that found, we can escape to one of the islands near at hand, if your sister can only walk to the shore. The pirate ship is returning, I fear. But if all goes well, we shall be able, I trust, to steal a boat and try to escape."

At this moment a head was protruded through the cavern entrance, and a voice said:

"Hist! Here!"

As Jack came out on the rocks in answer to the summons, he saw the bright light of the ship where it was anchoring in deep water close to the shore.

"They will soon be here," said Ben Brace, "and we shall know in a moment who they are by their lingo."

"Yes," said Tom Meadows, "I should know 'em anywhere, only I might, after all, mistake Greeks for them 'ere Italians."

"I think you'd be in a dilemma, Ben," said Jack, "for the lingo, as you call it, is common to all the Mediterranean, no matter where they hail from. It is called *lingua franca*, and is a kind of mixture of all the dialects spoken on the seaboard."

The sound of the chain-cables running through the hawse-holes seemed almost close at hand.

Listening carefully, as soon as she swung round to the tide, they heard a hoarse voice giving orders.

The crew immediately flew to the davits and lowered the boats.

A number of men in a nondescript kind of costume crowded at once into them, and rowed towards the shore.

"We'd better make ourselves scarce and hide," said Ben Brace, in a whisper. "Them's suspicious-looking characters."

At this moment Jack, as the moon came from behind a huge cloud, uttered a hasty exclamation.

"What's up now?" said Ben Brace.

"Ralph Howard!" said Jack, pointing to the foremost boat, where the pirate sat in the stern-sheets steering.

"Then we'd better be off now, Ben. Here, behind these big, loose bowlders. The tide's up, but never mind, we've had too much salt water in our time to be afraid of the cramp. Come on!"

It was time to conceal themselves.

Though the moon, which had been so entirely out of sight behind banks of clouds, had suddenly illumined the scene for a moment, she quickly went in again.

But there was another danger.

The men in the first boat at once lit some torches, and in their red glow jumped ashore.

And as our three friends stood knee-deep in the water which splashed up against them from the deep basin where the five pirates lay dead, they saw the faces of all as they landed.

The presence of Ralph had prepared them for the terrible crew who would follow.

But nevertheless they were astonished when they saw the monk Alfieri.

Indeed Jack could hardly repress an exclamation of surprise.

But he restrained himself, merely grasping Ben Brace with one hand, and pointing to the tall monk, dressed in the usual long habit of the bare-footed friars, with the cowl drawn closely over his head.

The three waited until the whole of the pirate crew had landed.

"Shiver my timbers!" said Ben Brace, as they went, "if the ladies were only with us, we could take the ship and all and escape."

It was a splendid idea.

Jack paused to think.

"Why, Ben," he said, "that can be done!"

"How?"

"Easily, with a little courage."

"But explain."

And Ben and Tom Meadows bent forward to listen eagerly.

"Why, you see," said Jack, "the priest, Alfieri, is here."

"Well?"

"He is our friend."

"Yes."

"He is in the cave with the ladies."

"Yes, but the pirates are there also."

"I know that; but after this successful battle they will carouse."

"And the priest, too," said Ben, "or I'm a whale."

"I think not," said Jack. "I should think that he would be very careful in the company that he is in. He knows enough of them to be wary of them."

"But what is your plan?" asked Tom Meadows. "We're anxious to know, Master Jack."

"It is this, then," said our hero, and he lowered his voice:

"We must go into our cave, and creep to the opening which leads into the larger cavern."

"From this spot we can see everything that occurs."

"When the pirates have had their fill, they will some of them go to sleep, and some of them no doubt will retire altogether."

"At any rate, they will not be in a state to observe us much."

"We will then rouse Alfieri, if he is asleep, or if he is awake we can make signs to him."

"Then we can tell him our plans, and with his help we can get them to the boats, and steal the ship."

"It's a good idea," said Ben Brace. "It's very risky, but I'm in it with you, lads."

"Come on, then."

There was no delay.

They at once crawled from their hiding-place.

As they went they had to pass the mouth of the large cave.

They heard proceeding thence loud shouts and laughter.

Jack's heart beat high with anger.

Why did they choose this cavern where the two girls were for their special carousing place?

But there was no use in giving way to passion now.

The battle was to be won by calmness and deliberation.

It was not long before they had passed the mouth of the pirates' cave and reached their own.

When they did so, they found that a great change had taken place.

A huge screen had been made of canvas, and stretched across the end of the cavern, so as entirely to cut off the part where the ladies were from the other.

On the one side, Emily was reclining on the goatskin rugs, striving to doze by the side of her sister, who was again fast asleep.

Two torches stuck in niches in the wall threw a weird red glow over the scene.

Beyond this partitioned part the pirates were seated around tables, dirty and blood-stained as they were, drinking wine from huge goblets, and feasting from some viands which had been hurriedly brought to them by the Greek girls.

There was nothing more unseemly going on than singing and loud laughter, and too much indulgence in drink.

They were a strange and terrible-looking crew, however, as they sat there.

Some were wounded in the head, and had handkerchiefs tied around their blood-stained brows.

Some with wounds in their arms and legs, and hands covered with blood, tied up, their eyes gleaming with an unnatural excitement.

Alfieri, the monk, pretended to drink with the rest.

But, as Jack had expected, he did not partake of much refreshment, though he tried to appear as if he were indulging like the others.

Presently a new element was imported into the scene.

At a sign from Ralph the Greek girls divested themselves of their outward heavy clothing, and appeared in the costume of dancing-girls.

They began a series of grotesque and graceful figures, which the pirates applauded furiously.

The drink had begun its effect on all, even the dancing girls, whose eyes glistened wildly, and who began to fling their limbs about, and whirl and glide hither and thither, in a manner so weird as to be wholly indescribable.

In spite of the perilous nature of their position the two boys could not help being fascinated by the strange scene.

The fun grew fast and furious.

The girls' antics became more rapid and more strange, while the pirates were quickly and surely succumbing to the influence of the bad spirits and strong wine they were consuming.

Loud applause rent the air.

The men clapped their hands and stamped with their feet.

Then, one by one, they fell forward with their

heads on the tables, or lay down on the skins on which they had been squatting.

At length Ralph and Alfieri were the only ones awake.

Even the girls had ceased their dancing and flung themselves, exhausted, on the cavern floor.

Ralph himself seemed scarcely able to keep awake.

He addressed a few words to the monk, but he kept yawning, and it was not long before his head fell on his breast, and leaning forward at length on the table, he fell into a heavy sleep like the rest.

The hearts of Jack and his companions beat high now.

The time for making the trial had come.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW JACK AND HIS FRIENDS CAPTURED THE PIRATE SHIP.

As Jack stepped forward from his concealment, Alfieri had risen from his seat and was regarding Ralph with a strange look of triumph.

His hand went to his girdle as if in search of some weapon.

But he was given no time for any thoughts of revenge.

Jack knew that if any such attempt was made, it might result in failure, and then all hope would be over.

So he advanced quickly, with Ben and Tom Meadows behind.

He held a warning finger on his lip.

A strange look came into Alfieri's eyes.

A look of utter astonishment and surprise mingled with a puzzled glance.

"You here, boy?" he exclaimed. "What does it mean?"

"We are here to save the ladies yonder," said Jack, pointing to the canvas screen.

"You have your ship here then?"

"No."

"What then?"

"We must capture the pirate vessel, and sail away in that," said Jack. "But come," he added, noting the look of utter amazement on the features of the priest, "come, let us go to the entrance of the cave; we can talk there with more chance of safety."

In a few moments they were standing without on the ledge of rock.

The night was very dark.

But still they could make out clearly the form of the big ship looming near.

"Now," said Alfieri, the monk, "what is your plan?"

"We must take one of these boats, and get aboard," said our hero. "I fancy they have left few, if any men, on the vessel. If they have, we must fight our way on deck, and having disposed of our enemies, come back and fetch the ladies."

"You are a bold lad, and you make sure of victory," said Alfieri, with a smile.

"Ay," replied Jack. "I am a boy of England, and my motto never fails."

"And then?"

"We must take both the boats, get aboard once more, and set sail for one of the islands."

Alfieri, the monk, listened with an eagerness which was strange indeed.

"The plan is excellent," he said. "I will aid you in every way I can. Let us get into one of the boats at once, and tow the other. But first let us bore a hole in her."

With wondrous agility he sprang into one of the boats, and kneeling down, began to bore a hole with an instrument which he took from an inside pocket.

In a few minutes it was all ready, and the four, entering the other boat, began pulling quickly towards the pirate ship.

They made no concealment.

Whoever was on the vessel was sure to know Alfieri, and he could at once blind them to any danger.

As the boat drew towards the ship's side a voice hailed it.

But no answer was given at the moment.

The other boat had now filled, and they were busily engaged in drifting her off with the rope, so that she might not interfere with their progress, and might not, moreover, be seen from the brig to be doing anything of the kind.

By dexterous handling of the rope they contrived so to sway the water-logged boat that its nose dipped beneath the surface, and in another moment it disappeared.

Without further hesitation our hero and his friends then began rowing again to the ship's side.

There was no time for pause.

At any moment the pirates might wake from their drunken slumber, and coming from the cavern discover the loss of the boats.

So they pulled quickly.

Presently the same voice hailed them again in *lingua franca*.

"Ah!" whispered Alfieri, "that is the black cook."

"It is I—Alfieri," he shouted. "I have a message for you, Manueto."

In another moment they were alongside the ship.

They lost no time in hitching on, and clambering up the chains.

Alfieri was the first to get on deck.

And when there, Jack saw that he was confronted by six men, at the head of whom was a black.

As soon as our hero and his two friends also made their way on deck, the pirates saw that they were strangers.

"False priest! he has betrayed us!" shouted the black.

And he sprang upon Alfieri.

But the latter was not unprepared for this.

He drew, like lightning, a sword, which he had concealed somewhere beneath his long robe.

"What! you attack me?" he cried; "one of the sacred order? You will find that I can defend myself, and have those with me who will aid me. Lay down your arms, if ye do not wish the curse of Heaven to fall upon you."

The black at this burst into a hoarse laugh, which was echoed by the five other pirates.

"Let us slay the *Inglesi*," cried one of the latter as the priest stood at bay, "and then we will throw down our arms."

"Dictate not to me," cried Alfieri. "These three persons are my friends, and while the *Capitano* Ralph is away we are to take charge here. We are to make sail for Chios at once."

A dark-bearded pirate, about forty, who had been drinking enough to be insolent and defiant, but who was sufficiently sober to be a very awkward adversary, advanced at this.

"Priest," he said, "we acknowledge no other captain save Ralph Howard. You had better leave us, and tell our captain to come himself or send our new English lieutenant. Then we may believe your words. If not, you must leave the ship."

Alfieri seemed for a moment to be debating these words.

Then he said—

"Do as you will. I am here by order of Captain Ralph. My friends here are sailors, and good ones, too, and they can do what you refuse to."

"Never, while I live, false monk!" cried the pirate.

And he fired a pistol at the priest.

This was the *denouement* that Alfieri feared.

Ralph was not so intoxicated as the others.

A recurrence of pistol shots so near the shore might easily have the effect of awakening him; and though without boats he and his men could not reach the vessel, or interfere in any way with their movements, the object of the whole affair would be defeated.

The two English girls would be left behind.

"We must stop this firing," said he to Jack; "close in with swords on the pirates."

The three English adventurers did not want much incitement.

They made a rush at once, and in an instant the battle commenced.

The English trio, as may be imagined, made a desperate attack upon their enemies, who, taken aback by the sudden rush, were unable to use their pistols.

At any rate, Jack and his companions would have fought like demons.

But now they were urged to greater exertions by the knowledge that a protracted battle might result in the rousing of the pirates, and the upsetting of all their plans.

However, no sign at present came from the pirates' cavern.

This silence gave our hero and his friends additional courage.

They fought like demons; and gradually the fortunes of the day began again to declare for the English.

Manueto, the cook, who was a powerful and ill-looking African, fought most desperately.

With an idea that the priest would not be likely to be a good fighter, he attacked him. But he found himself egregiously mistaken.

Instead of being a bad swordsman he was a brilliant one; and in this combat, where six men were opposed to four, he managed to spare a thrust or a parry to others besides the black.

For some time the conflict raged.

At the end the pluck and endurance of Jack and the others prevailed; and the pirates, fighting to the last, and defending every inch of deck, succumbed, and were flung overboard.

The victors paused but a few moments to reconnoiter.

Then Jack and Alfieri and the others once more entered the boat, and began to row ashore.

Once there, Tom was left in charge of the little craft, and the others proceeded cautiously into the big cave.

All was quiet.

The echoes of the conflict had not reached the drunken ears of the carousers.

Slowly and cautiously they proceeded behind the screen, and found Emily sitting up, anxiously holding Lydia's hand.

"Quick! come!" said Jack, "we have captured the pirate vessel, and all is well. But there must not be one moment's delay."

Lydia rose as one in a dream, when Emily spoke to her.

But there was no delay, and in a few moments they were walking on tiptoe across the wide cavern, among the sleeping villains.

Jack's heart was beating high now with expectation and delight.

He little guessed what would be his next adventure.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SPIDER'S CAGE.

NEAR the shore of the Island of Chios—the fated island where thousands of persons were lately engulfed in one of nature's most terrible convulsions, an earthquake—stood a small stone-built house.

It was surrounded by a low wall, and there was a little garden in front, with prim beds, and a kitchen-garden, well-kept, behind.

It was of the usual square, quaint shape, and had no distinguishing mark to identify it among its fellows, except a brass plate affixed to the outer gate, on which was indented in black letters the words (of course in the Greek tongue) "Demetrius Paleorgos."

Every one in the island could direct you to the house.

But more they could not do.

"What is he?" was a frequent question.

And the answers were many and various.

"A merchant"—"a money-lender"—but more generally—"a shipowner, for see how many captains of vessels come to see him."

No one was right, however.

Many persons had tried in all kinds of ways to fathom his secret.

But they had to give it up in despair.

He was in the prime of life—say about forty—a handsome man, with dark beard and mustache; a fine, piercing eye, and straight features; the model of a Greek of good position.

His wife and daughter were both fine specimens of Grecian beauties, and their dress was so exquisite as to be the envy of the other lady inhabitants of that quarter.

Demetrius was one night seated in an arm-chair in his own little room, at the very summit of his house.

All the household had retired to rest, with the exception of himself and one servant, a tall, powerful Abyssinian, whom the Greek had brought with him from Egypt.

Demetrius glanced up ever and anon with manifest anxiety at the window, where the brawny black was leaning.

"Is there no sign, Marcos?" he cried, at length.

"None, master."

"What can it mean?" muttered Demetrius.

"Leoni is usually so true to his time. And now he is more than eight days behindhand. I hope no evil has befallen him."

"I hope not," echoed the black named Marcos.

He was but a living echo.

He was the slave of his master's will.

For a few moments Demetrius again glanced at his papers impatiently.

Then, as if unable to be patient any longer, he sprang to his feet.

"Come, Marcos!" he cried, "get the lantern. I can endure this suspense no longer. If I see not Leoni in a few hours, I am undone. Let us go out on the promontory, and search seawards."

"Good, my master," said Marcos.

He took down from the wall a dark lantern, and lit it; then, arming himself with two telescopes, unhitched a bunch of keys from a hook, and was ready.

Follow me, quick!" cried Demetrius; "I must and will know the worst."

Marcos preceded Demetrius down the staircase, which was evidently built in the hollow wall (and was a secret one), until, by many turns and twists, they reached a large chamber at the base of the building, or rather, beneath the building proper.

This was a sumptuously furnished apartment, far more sumptuously arrayed, in fact than might have been expected from the position of the chamber.

Down once more the Abyssinian led him into a still lower room, which was but a stone kind of hall, and, from its peculiar smell, was no doubt far below the surface of the earth.

Turning aside out of this place, they now made their way along a narrow passage, which had years and years before been artificially cut in the rocks.

As they proceeded they could hear the murmur of the sea, and presently it was possible to distinguish its plashing.

They halted at this point.

"Are you sure you noticed how the tide was, Marcos?" said Demetrius. "It seems to me as if the water is above our heads."

Marcos smiled.

"If it were so," he said, "I would not open the trap-door. I know that the sea would rush in and overwhelm us. No! we have scant time: but the sound you hear is only the water flung forward by the wind. Let me go first; remember the rocks rise round the entrance like a wall, and there should be no fear of an inundation."

"Go on, then," said Demetrius, "I will trust in you."

The black at once ascended three steps, and undoing a long bolt above his head, allowed a trap-door to fall inwards.

A little moisture came through, but not enough to arrest their progress, and in a few moments they had passed through and stood among a mass of boulders on the verge of the advancing tide.

On one side they could have passed on to absolutely dry land; on the other a long ridge of rock, like a whale's back, projected high and dry, far out into the sea.

Along this, the shape of which they could plainly distinguish in the bright moonlight, they began to make their way.

Anxiously Demetrius gazed out over the moonlit wavelets.

For a long time, however, he beheld nothing but the great expanse of the Mediterranean, and then appearing in the distance came the shadow of a wide-sailed ship.

"I know it," said Demetrius, "I feel sure that is the *Wolf of the Waves*."

The Abyssinian shuddered as he heard this.

"Leoni's ship?"

"Yes."

"Do you know it, master?"

"Yes, I know it; and that is the ship I am waiting for. On board there is the stanch Leoni."

"Here comes the ship, master," said Marcos, with a deep bow. "What are my orders?"

"Hold up the lantern, Marcos."

The Abyssinian did so.

Over the rolling waves the sounds came of men shouting loudly.

Then an answering light.

"Now we have him," said Demetrius.

And as three red lights were waved, he said:

"There is something wrong aboard."

The Abyssinian glanced steadily towards the strange ship.

"Yes," he said, "you are right. There is something wrong aboard; and if so, master, it is no good to you or me."

"Then let us wait," said Demetrius.

How little did they think what strange and extraordinary events had occurred on board that vessel which they mistook for the *Wolf of the Waves*.

If they had, it is very certain that Demetrius would not have been so eager for its coming.

Far from it.

As we have seen, the coming of the ship was regarded by him as an advent of special good fortune.

His ruin, he had said, might come through its non-arrival.

But now the question was, what meant the shouts?

And what the red lights?

As a rule the vessel rounded the promontory and cast anchor in the deep waters of the little bay beyond.

Now a far different thing happened.

Suddenly all sails were reefed, and the vessel, still far off the end of the little promontory, came to a dead stop.

Then the rattling of the chain cables was heard. She was anchoring.

"What can this mean, Marcos?" said Demetrius.

"I know not, master," said the Abyssinian. "Shall I take the boat, and row out to her at once?"

"Yes, yes, do," said Demetrius.

Marcos lost no time.

Gliding off the flat piece of rock into the shallow water he pulled at a rope, and there approached at once a boat which had been dancing on the restless waves.

Into this he got, saying:
 "Will you come also, master?"
 Demetrius hesitated.
 "Wrage was not his forte."
 He preferred leaving perilous or doubtful enterprises to the man whom gratitude had made his friend.

"No, Marcos," he said, "I will not come. I will remain here, and await you."

The man said no more.
 His gratitude had not blinded him to the Greek's character.

He knew him to be a coward.
 So he willingly accepted the burden.
 So, without a shadow of fear, the Abyssinian settled himself to the oars, and rowed out to sea. He was not long in reaching the side of the vessel.

As we are, of course, well aware, the crew of the *Thunder*, which Demetrius had mistaken, like so many others, for the *Wolf of the Waves*, consisted of Alfieri the priest, and Jack and his two friends.

They had successfully brought the two girls on board, and had left the pirates, as they on a former occasion had left the boys, without a boat.

It was Alfieri who spoke to Marcos, as he drew near to the side of the vessel.

"Is that you, Marcos?" he cried, in *lingua franca*.

"Yes; who is it who speaks?"

"Alfieri, the priest; Leoni I know well," replied he. "Where is Demetrius?"

"Waiting on the promontory; but where are the men?"

"We left them on the island. I am on board with three Englishmen and two English ladies."

"And Leoni, where is he?"

"Ah, where is he? His ship was blown up, his crew massacred; but whether he was among those who were destroyed I know not. But come, let us get the two girls ashore. You must hitch on the boat and help us to lower them down."

This was no difficult task to the brawny Abyssinian.

First Lydia and Emily were handed down, and then Alfieri and the others scrambled into the wherry, and they began to row towards shore.

Marcos was anything but light of heart.

He knew how Demetrius had set his mind on the coming of Leoni.

And now he had not only not come, but this priest had arrived with news of a terrible disaster.

They found Demetrius waiting impatiently at the very extreme end of the promontory.

When the rope was thrown to him he drew in the boat eagerly.

"Whom have we here?" he cried.

"It is not well to talk now," said Alfieri. "Let us wait until we are in the house. We have two English girls that require rest."

The two girls were landed first; Lydia, still in a state of stupor, though she had just the use of her limbs, and Emily, active and willing enough, although she had in her heart some unaccountable feeling of dread.

"This way," said Marcos, in Italian, to Jack, and our hero and his friends quickly followed.

"Shiver my timbers," cried Ben Brace, "if this isn't a rum place. It's for all the world like walking over a whale's back."

"What do you know about whales?" said Jack, who, holding Emily's hand as they went on, was joyous with a great delight.

"Well, Master Jack, I can't worry well tell ye now as we're a-walkin' along this 'ere place," said the old sailor, "but one o' these days I'll tell ye a splendid story about whales. But—hallo! we're goin' down a companion-ladder now. See here."

On reaching the trap-door by which Marcos and his master had emerged into the open air from the subterranean passage there was a halt.

The Abyssinian knelt and unfastened the upper bolt, and then leaping down through the opening, assisted Lydia and Emily to descend.

Then the rest followed, the trap was re-closed, and the party began to make their way along the gloomy corridor.

On reaching the first chamber at the end, Alfieri, who had said something in a low tone to Demetrius, stopped.

"Where can our consultation take place?" he said. "I have a great deal to tell you, and great favors to ask for these brave Englishmen."

"We had better leave the ladies to rest here," said Demetrius; "no doubt they need it. We can go up to my room to talk."

"It is almost useless for my two friends to come up," said Jack; "they do not understand one word of Italian."

"Very well," returned Alfieri; "they can remain in the lower chamber, if Marcos will bring a light."

So it was arranged.

Ben Brace and Tom Meadows were placed in the lowest room with a lamp which Marcos brought, and a fire which he lit from what was evidently old wreckage.

Lydia and Emily were given luxurious apartments, and Jack and the others went up into the turret-chamber.

Our hero was full of exultation at the result of his stratagems.

He little knew that after all his courageous battles he had but led his friends and himself into the spider's cage.

CHAPTER XI.

SUSPICIOUS.

WHEN the three were seated in Demetrius' private room, and Marcos had brought some refreshment at his master's bidding, as well as taken some down to the two ladies, the Greek said:

"And now then, reverend father, pray tell me what brings you here, and what is this misfortune which has befallen Leoni?"

Briefly Alfieri detailed all that had occurred. Demetrius listened attentively.

"And what is it you wish that I should do?" he asked.

"I wish," replied Alfieri, "that you would allow my friends to remain here until they succeed in collecting a crew, in order to sail to Genoa."

"Certainly," said Demetrius; "my house is open to them all."

"The two ladies, then, can occupy the two rooms where they now are," said Alfieri, "and to-morrow I and my friends can go in search of some sailors."

"Very good," replied Demetrius. "As you are a reverend father of the Church to which I belong you are welcome to bed and board for as long as you wish. Command me in everything."

"There is one thing I must ask as a favor from you, Signor Gale," said the monk.

"What is that?" asked Jack.

"That you will permit me to have a short conversation in private with Signor Demetrius. There are a few things touching a little matter in which he is interested in Italy that I desire to speak of."

Jack rose at once.

"Certainly," he said. "Why should I desire to prevent you in any way? I will go down to my friends and have some rest; I need it badly. Can your servant show me the way?"

"Show the English signor to the room where his friends are," said Demetrius, addressing Marcos, who, during the conversation, had stood like a mute regarding the party, not understanding more than a few words of real Italian, "and then return to me."

The slave—for he was no better—bowed in acquiescence.

Then Jack shook hands with both the priest and Demetrius, and preceded by Marcos went down into the lowest chamber, where Ben Brace and Tom Meadows were discussing the situation.

As they went down Marcos kept peering back into the darkness to see if they were being followed.

They had to pass through the outer chamber of the two where Emily and Lydia were.

Both were fast asleep.

Lydia had thrown herself on the couch, and was lying with her head reclining on one arm, while Emily had subsided into an easy-chair, and was slumbering peacefully too.

The two passed on without speaking, though Jack would much like to have wished them good-night, and in a few minutes they were in the presence of Ben Brace and Tom Meadows.

"We began to think you'd made all sail to Italy, Master Jack," cried Ben Brace, smiling under the combined influence of peace and victory, and the strong spirit which he had imbibed pretty freely.

"No, here I am in the flesh," said Jack. "We have been giving our worthy host the details of the destruction of Leoni's ship. But now I feel quite tired out, and shall not be sorry when sleep drives away all recollections of the horrors we have gone through."

At this moment something happened to astonish them.

"Be on your guard," said Marcos, in pure English; "much as he pretends friendship, the monk might betray you."

"You speak English!" cried Jack, in great surprise.

"Yes," said the Abyssinian, with a smile. "When I was in Egypt a kind Englishman taught me his language, long before I was saved from my cruel master by Demetrius. I have not

spoken it for many a day, but I cannot forget it. So I say, be on your guard, and do not trust too much to the monk."

He passed away as he said this, and left the three to themselves; and having taken the precaution to bolt the door on the inside, our friends were soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXI.

JEALOUSY—A NEW ALLY.

MEANWHILE Marcos, after passing the room in which the two girls were fast asleep still, crept up the stairs towards the room of Demetrius with the gliding and noiseless step of a serpent.

On reaching the door, which he had left ajar, he paused.

Voices could be heard.

But not those of Demetrius and Alfieri.

He could distinguish plainly the voice of a woman.

Crouching down he applied one eye to a small round hole in the door, which had evidently been made purposely, and peered into the chamber.

What he saw there transformed him as it were into stone.

Alfieri was bending down, busy with some writing.

Near Demetrius stood a young girl of some nineteen years of age, with the true Egyptian face, and the true Egyptian complexion.

She was dressed in Greek costume, the open jacket revealing the muslin underbody cut low, and showing a pair of well-formed golden-colored shoulders.

Her eyes were black as jet, with long lashes, giving them a strange dreamy expression.

Her lips were now parted in a smile, and as Marcos peered through the aperture he saw Demetrius place his arm around her neck, draw her down, and kiss her on her rosy mouth.

The passion which raged suddenly in the man's breast was terrible to see.

He did not burst forth into torrents of furious excitement.

He did not rush into the room and strike his master to the floor.

He clenched his hands and shook them fiercely above his head, rose up to his full height held his breath, and having by a mighty effort, conquered his emotion, he knocked at the door.

"Come in," cried Demetrius, dismissing the young girl by a wave of the hand.

She passed out at once, though she knew well that it was Marcos who knocked.

As the Abyssinian passed into the room, his countenance was remarkable only for its rigidity.

Nothing was there to show the exciting passion which filled his breast.

"They have retired to rest, master," he said, stolidly.

"Good; you can also retire," returned Demetrius. "At dawn I may require you."

"The dawn cannot be far off, master," said Marcos; "it is even now getting gray towards the east."

"Nevertheless I shall not require you," said Demetrius.

The Abyssinian bowed, and at once quitted the room.

But he did not go far from the outside of it.

"That is a strange fellow," said Alfieri the monk, when he had gone.

"Yes, but as true as steel."

"No doubt," replied the monk; "though I am apt to doubt those inscrutable faces."

"It is the nature of his country," said Demetrius; "but I have found him brave and faithful."

"Very likely," said Alfieri; "but I should imagine that if he were put out, if he were to fancy that he was being betrayed, he might prove an ugly customer."

Marcos understood all this, as they were speaking in *lingua franca*.

A strange smile, a smile full of terrible meaning, flitted over the dark face as he heard the words.

"True," he said, "I shall prove an ugly customer. But Fatima! What of her? Can I disguise from her the torrent of rage which surges over my heart? Yes, yes; let her dream on, let him dream on also. Marcos will watch. Then he will strike first at his fortune, then at his life!"

He still waited.

Presently Alfieri spoke again.

"Is all quiet now?" he said. "Have all the household retired?"

"Yes."

"Then we can speak in safety?"

"Yes, speak and fear not," said Demetrius.

"I am all impatience to hear your plan."

"Good. I will no longer delay," said Alfieri;

"but since even walls have ears, I have written down here my most important secrets."

As he spoke he pushed across to the Greek the paper on which he had been writing.

At the first words Demetrius fell back on his chair with astonishment depicted on his face—utter, blank astonishment.

"Can this be true?" he said.

"It is, indeed," said Alfieri; "but read on."

The Greek did so.

As he perused the writing the expression of his face changed from mere pleasure to extreme delight, and presently he said:

"I am yours in all of this. You can depend on me in everything. In the first place, you are, of course, the firm friend of Leoni, although to these English persons you appear his enemy."

"Yes I am as great a friend of Leoni as if he were myself," said the priest; "but I have a great reason why I do not wish to perform the ceremony I have mentioned in that memorandum."

"That's nothing to me. Proceed and tell me your own wishes."

"There is a Greek monastery, with a chapel, is there not, on the top of the cliffs overhanging the sea?"

"Yes."

"Well, I do not know whether things have changed since last I was here; there was a priest there of the name of Katapolos."

"He is there now."

"Good," said Alfieri. "On the third night from this then I shall produce the pirate Leoni, and we can take the elder girl to the chapel, and there the marriage can be performed. She can then return to this spot and remain under your care until she has returned to reason."

"And the younger girl?"

"You can make a good market out of her," said Alfieri. "In the slave market at Constantinople she will sell for a large sum of money, and that you can keep for yourself. Is it a bargain?"

"My hand on it," said the Greek, and he extended his white jeweled palm towards the Italian monk, who gripped it firmly, and said—

"All is arranged then. On the third night the marriage shall take place. In the meantime I shall occupy myself in finding a crew for the *Thunder*."

"The pirate ought to reward you handsomely for all your trouble," said Demetrius.

The priest smiled.

"The Church will, no doubt, be the richer for it," said he. "Of what use is wealth to me? And now," he added, as he rose, "I will betake myself below."

"Can you find your way down?" asked the Greek.

"Yes," replied Alfieri: "good-night."

And he began to make his way down towards the subterranean chambers.

As he passed through the first and luxuriously furnished room, he saw that Lydia and her sister had retired to the inner apartment.

When he reached the chamber below, he approached with greater caution, and a restless fumbling of his hand underneath his priest's robe seemed to indicate that he was searching for his dagger.

But if his purpose was an evil one it was quickly defeated.

For there, immovable, impenetrable as the sphinx of the desert, sat the Abyssinian on guard.

He was armed to the teeth.

"What are you doing here?" asked the priest, in a voice which betrayed the slightest possible degree of irritation.

"I am guarding my master's guests," was the calm answer.

"Why do they need guarding? and by whose orders are you here?" asked Alfieri.

"I have always orders to guard all those who retire to rest in these chambers," replied Marcos calmly. "There are others besides ourselves who know the secret entrance, and we cannot tell what might happen."

"Be it as you will," said Alfieri, as he threw himself on a couch of skins.

And covering himself over with another, he was soon asleep.

Marcos watched him intently.

He had heard all the scheme of villainy, or, at least, he had understood enough of what they had said in the *lingua franca* to understand that terrible danger threatened the two girls.

What was intended against their English friends he could not guess.

But, at any rate, he resolved to be on the watch.

All that night he remained on the watch, and when morning came, and Jack and his friends with Alfieri went up to the room of Demetrius, Marcos whispered to Jack in English:

"This day at noon on the promontory. Be there on your life, for danger surrounds you all."

CHAPTER XXII.

A GREEK BREAKFAST—CROSS PURPOSES.

As may be well imagined, Jack and his companions waited impatiently for the moment when they should meet the Abyssinian on the promontory.

It was easy for our hero to guess that there was something wrong afloat.

But what could it be?

Of this he had not the remotest suspicion.

Demetrius entertained them at a most sumptuous breakfast.

Never had Jack tasted such outlets, such omelettes, such melons, such eggs, such bread, or such coffee.

At length Jack said, addressing the priest:

"What do you propose doing after breakfast?"

"I am going to look around me to see if I cannot get together a crew, however small, in order to run the *Thunder* over to Italy. She will be a prize indeed to take into Genoa."

"Yes," said Jack; "and a splendid reward you will be able to claim from the English government for the brave way you have aided in saving British subjects."

The priest smiled.

"Well, as you are going in search of a crew," said Jack, "I shall have a look around the island. There is no hurry for us to do anything yet, for, at any rate, we cannot sail for some little time."

Alfieri paused a moment.

He seemed as if struck by a sudden idea.

"Yes, yes; that will be good," he said, "and I will go and select the sailors."

Jack smiled.

"It seems strange for a priest," he said, "to talk about selecting sailors."

"It does," said Alfieri; "but you do not understand the language in which it is necessary to speak to them, and I do."

"Well, go your journey," said Jack; "I and my two friends will take a tour around the island."

Soon after Alfieri started on his journey.

Jack descended to the rooms of the two girls, and knocking, asked for admittance.

He found only Emily, who was waited on by Fatima, the wife of the Abyssinian.

She was full of eager delight at seeing him, and despite the presence of a third person, a warm embrace passed between them.

"I am so glad to see you," said Emily. "I feel so alarmed now with strangers, no matter how kind they may be to me. I have seen so much treachery and deceit that I am afraid of every one I do not know."

"I do not wonder at that," said Jack. "I myself am fearful of trusting any one, although it is part of my business to cast fear to the winds. How is your sister, Mrs. Harden?"

"About the same," said Emily. "I do not know what will be the end of it. Her mind seems entirely gone."

"Well, well, that may be our safeguard," said Jack; "but tell me, Emily, would it be possible for you to leave your sister to-morrow in the care of Fatima for a couple of hours?"

Emily glanced at him in astonishment.

"Leave her—why?"

"Because I and my companions are going to explore the island to-day, and I thought that perhaps to-morrow you might come out with me and see the place."

The girl's eyes lighted up with a glad look.

"Oh, yes, they seem very friendly to us here; and so, if you can arrange with your friend, the master of the house, to allow the Egyptian girl to remain here for that time, I shall be delighted. I have had so sad and miserable a life lately that such a chance seems too much enjoyment to be real."

Jack laughed at this.

"You mustn't give way to melancholy in that way, Emily," he said, "or we shall never be able to pull through. Why, just look at me. Here am I, stuck on a Greek island, with not the slightest idea where my captain or my late shipmates are; lying, too, under the ban of having broken my word of honor to the young French captain Lefevre, and knowing not from one minute to another what the next hour will bring forth."

"Yes, that is very well, Jack," she said, "but my position is worse—in charge of a sister whose husband is either dead or in captivity, and who is either insane or on the verge of insanity through the dreadful troubles she has undergone. But there, we won't talk about troubles any more. Yes, I will come out to-morrow, and I shall look forward to it with great delight."

She little dreamt then of the tragedy which was to be enacted in a few hours, or that she was destined by Demetrius to be exposed publicly for sale in the slave-market at Constantinople.

Once more Jack embraced her fondly.

Then, having promised to come and see her again as soon as he returned from his day's explorations, he hurried off to meet Ben Brace and Tom Meadows, and keep his appointment with Marcos the Abyssinian.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON THE PROMONTORY—WATCHED—FIRST SYMPTOMS OF TREACHERY.

THE three friends were, of course, permitted now to take their way down the public staircase and out into the public road.

Jack knew that there was danger somewhere, or Marcos would not have so secretly asked him to meet him on the promontory.

You had, in order to reach the pleasant road which led down to the beach, to pass along the whole length of the garden.

After walking for some time, they could see the promontory, stretching its whale-like back out into the sea, and the dark hull of the pirate vessel lying at anchor beyond it.

"No one is there," said Jack to Ben Brace, to whom he had imparted tidings of the proposed interview.

The old sailor made a telescope of his right hand.

"Ah," he said, "there's the promontory, and there's the gallant old ship."

"Gallant old ship, eh?" cried Jack. "Why that's the pirate vessel."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Ben Brace, "but she ain't no pirate now. She's been manned by three British tars, and that's purified her like. When we start again in her we'll call her the *British King*, instead of the *Thunder*."

It did not take them long to reach the little promontory.

At first it seemed as if no one was there to meet them.

But presently, the dusky form of the Abyssinian rose up as if it were from the waves, for the water was playing over the circle of rocks which surrounded the trap-door.

He was attired, we may say disguised, in the dress of an English sailor.

He looked like a sailor from a dusky clime enlisted into the English service.

"Have you done anything to excite suspicion?" he asked, addressing Jack as the leader of the little party.

"Nothing," replied our hero. "We have breakfasted with Alfieri the monk, and Demetrius, your master, and they have no thought that we suspect them, which indeed I have small cause to do until I understand of what they are accused."

The Abyssinian paused to glance round to assure himself that no doubtful people were about.

Then he said—

"Of what are they accused? Did I not hear it? Have I not been asked to aid them in their villainy?"

"I doubt you not, good Marcos," said Jack; "but I thought I was free from treachery when I was aided by Alfieri the priest."

A sardonic smile passed over the face of Marcos, the Abyssinian, as he heard this.

"Alfieri is your biggest enemy," he said.

"Our enemy?"

"Yes; he is Leoni's friend."

"Leoni is dead."

As Jack said these words Marcos glanced anxiously round him.

He seemed afraid that the very waves would listen as they plashed against the rugged sides of the promontory, and roll away and tell the secret elsewhere.

"Come away from this place," he said, in a low whisper, "and I will tell you all. Listen. Leoni the pirate is not dead!"

"Not dead! This is indeed strange and bad news, for he is our greatest enemy."

Jack turned and saw Demetrius gazing at them, and watching their movements through a long telescope.

The Abyssinian turned to Jack and said: "I will ask his permission to show you the curiosities of the island."

"But your dress?" cried Jack.

"I am accustomed to wear it at times," replied Marcos. "I wear it now in honor to the English sailors."

"Go, then, quickly, and obtain his permission," said Jack; "we are all impatient to hear your news. I know from your manner it must be important. Shall we remain here?"

"No," said Marcos; "make your way to yonder landing-stage, where the boats are. I will tell him you wish me to pull you round to the caves of Corythea."

They did not pause to inquire what he meant.

Meanwhile, the Abyssinian passed down quickly through the trap-door, and hastened up towards his master's private room.

As he went up he passed through the extremity of the large apartment, where Lydia was lying on the couch with Emily near her.

As he entered and approached her he placed his finger on his lip.

"Be careful," he said, in a low tone; "you are in danger, and must keep good watch. But trust in me. I will save you and your friends, even if it is at the peril of my life."

Then, without pausing to explain more, the strange being passed up towards his master's room.

He had no difficulty in obtaining the permission of Demetrius.

"You will get little for your pains, Marcos," he said, with a laugh, "for I do not suppose they have a piaster between them."

"No matter, master," said Marcos. "I like the English."

Then he hastily took his leave, and joined his new friends.

His heart was angry at the notion of leaving Fatima alone.

But he had fashioned his revenge, and he was calm and collected until the time came for its fulfillment.

As soon as he reached the landing-stage he said, pointing again along the rugged coast, for he knew Demetrius would be still watching his movements:

"Yonder are the caves of Corythea; in a case of desperate emergency they might be useful."

"Let us go there, then," said Jack.

They at once entered the boat and pulled out to sea.

As they were rounding a rock, they saw a group of men entering a boat at the landing-stage they had just left.

These men pulled out at a rapid rate from the shore, and made for the *Thunder*.

In the dimness of distance Jack imagined he could make out the form of Alfieri.

"What does that mean, I wonder?" he said. "Why is he taking them on board without us? Can it be that he is preparing to fly while we are absent?"

"No, no," said Marcos, "you need not fear that at any rate. What I have to tell you is far worse than that. I have already told you that Leoni is not dead, but I have to warn you of a greater evil still. Alfieri is his bosom friend, and is furthering his interests, not yours."

"The deceitful villain!" exclaimed Jack, his face paling, and his whole being sustaining a shock as if he had been stabbed. "How glad I shall be when those innocent girls are out of these latitudes. I begin to hate and fear the very name of Italian."

"As I begin to hate that of a Greek," said Marcos, with a bitter emphasis. "But to business. You have three days before you, if you count this as one, and you must make the most of your time."

"Three days!" exclaimed Jack. "And what then?"

"At the end of that period Leoni will be here."

"But whence comes he," exclaimed Jack, "when he was destroyed in the vessel which was blown up?"

"I know not," said Marcos. "He is a man of crime and mystery, and no one knows his movements. However, there is no doubt that he will be here, for Alfieri is certain, and he is not a man to make statements without positive knowledge."

"Well, and what are Leoni's plans?" asked Jack.

"I listened, and heard them all from the lips of Alfieri," said Marcos. "He has agreed with this Greek that on the evening of the third day from this the lady who is now so ill shall be taken to the Greek chapel which stands on the hill above the town, and there united to him in marriage by the priest."

"By Alfieri?"

"No, no. It would be no marriage were it so," said Marcos. "By the Greek priest, I mean, who is but a slave to the will of Demetrius."

"Great heavens!" cried Jack. "And we are helpless! Unless, indeed, we appeal to the citizens."

The Abyssinian shook his head.

"Worse than useless," said he. "The citizens are all hand and glove with Demetrius. He is in with those who in these times of war bring them wealth, and he could easily get you cast into prison."

"Then what is to be done?"

"You must trust to your own right arm," said the Abyssinian. "And I will go heart and soul into the conflict with you."

"Good," said Jack, musingly; "we will be

guided by you. What do you think of it, Ben Brace?"

"Well, if it weren't that it was so full o' danger and such like," said the old sailor, "I should say it was like one of these ere comic plays. Up and down, in and out, here we are, here we ain't. Why, we never know one moment from another, if we're going to get a bit o' rest. For my part, Master Jack, I shan't be sorry when I'm on the deck of a good old English man-o'-war again."

"That's what I say," said Tom Meadows.

"You're surely not crying off, shipmates?" said Jack.

"Cryin' off!" cried Ben Brace, in a voice that echoed loudly over the quiet waters. "Lor' love yer, when did ye find any cryin' off about me? I was only sayin' I did not like this 'ere 'ole and corner work, and as for that, I know yer feel the same, Master Jack."

"Well, I must say I've had about enough of it," said Jack; "but still, I'm determined to go on."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Ben Brace; "and so say we; we ain't a-goin' to desert our colors, never fear."

"But," said Marcos, "I have more yet to explain."

"Yes," replied Jack. "You have not mentioned the fate assigned to Emily, the sister of the unfortunate lady of whom you have spoken."

"I almost dread to tell," said Marcos.

"And why?"

"Because I fear you could not conceal your anger sufficiently, and then all would be lost."

"I will restrain myself, no matter what you tell me," said Jack, "if it is for the good of my friends; then speak and fear not."

"The younger sister, the one whom I believe you love," said Marcos, "is to be given to Demetrius, who will send her to be sold at the slave-market of Constantinople."

The news thus suddenly told to him so overwhelmed Jack that for a few minutes he was unable to speak.

"The slave market!" he muttered, after a moment, as all the full horror of the situation came before him.

The idea of a young, pretty and delicate girl being exposed in the manner in which girls are exposed there made his blood run cold.

It was too horrible indeed to think of.

"Are you not mistaken?" said he, after a moment's thought.

"No, I have made no mistake," said the Abyssinian; "it is all too true."

"Then why not act at once?" cried Jack; "get them on board ship, and fly to Italy? Better risk the perils of the sea than the vengeance of such demons as those."

"True," said Marcos; "but you saw the boat's crew pulling towards the *Thunder*. You could not, in the face of them and Alfieri, and with two ladies in your charge, force your way on board."

"True," said Jack; "but what then can be done?"

"You must be patient," said Marcos. "It is of no use to act in a headlong manner. What we must do is to oppose cunning by cunning, and we shall succeed. If you talk about taking the ladies away, you must take them by night to the caves of Corythea, where I am now about to lead you. And then we can conceal ourselves until we see some English vessel who will take us off, in spite of all the Greeks in creation."

"Can this be done to-night?" said Jack.

"I do not know," replied Marcos, "but remember you have till the night after to-morrow to do this; and you must not run the risk of losing everything by being rash."

"Certainly not," said Jack, "although it is hard to wait. But fear not. I am all impatience to see the caves and return. Pull away, Ben."

"All right, Master Jack," said the sailor, as he bent to the oars, "all right, but I'm thinking we're in a nice nest of land pirates as well as sea pirates."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CAVES OF CORYTHEA.

THE caves of Corythea were situated at some distance from the extreme point of the bluff which stood out so prominently from the shore.

It was a strange and picturesque spot.

The rocks struck out, as it were, into all kinds of odd shapes; little archways where mermaids might be supposed to dart in and out; great jagged pieces of strange proportion and contour; long projections like icicles here and there; and then wide fissures up from the whispering waves running to the very top of the cliffs.

It was into one of these fissures that the boat was guided.

It was a most wonderful place—archways

everywhere, leading into beautiful caverns full of calm blue water.

Marcos was talking of the caves of Corythea as a place of safety for Lydia and Emily, but where could they be concealed?

There seemed to be not a particle of dry land anywhere.

"I don't see the advantage of coming here," said Jack.

"We have to go through a regular maze of caverns before we reach the one which is known only to myself and another. Fear not; you will not find Marcos deceive you. His fault has been that he has been too faithful to a wretch who has deceived him."

"I do not doubt that," said Jack, "after what I have seen of Demetrius. But hasten on."

They bent to their oars with a will, and in a few moments the boat shot through the archway into quieter water still.

It lay there in semi-gloom; the daylight was too far off to penetrate into its recesses.

But Marcos seemed to need no guide.

As one who could plunge along to the given point, even in the darkness, he steered straight across the black expanse, and within a few minutes, passing across an inner lake, that grew black as Erebus as he proceeded, he cried:

"Here we are!—steady!"

As they shipped their oars the boat glided softly up to the rocky shore, and Jack having hitched on with a boat-hook, the Abyssinian leaped out, right into the darkness, as if sure of a footing.

And sure he was, for he landed at once safely; and, placing his hand in a niche, pulled out a torch, which he lit, and raised above his head.

"Jump ashore!" he cried; "throw me the rope, and I will steady the boat!"

In a moment or two the three English sailors had landed, and were waiting, in eager expectancy, the next move on the part of their dusky guide.

They had not long to wait.

"This way," said Marcos.

Following him, they soon found themselves in a small cave, about able to hold four or five people in comfort.

"This cave is a secret," said Marcos, "but a greater secret still is this fissure. What I am going to show you is no doubt a relic of the old sea-pirates—the real old pirates of the Mediterranean; the wild and bloodthirsty corsairs who issued forth from the ports of Genoa and the Grecian Isles to prey on all they met."

As he spoke thus he led them through the fissure into a narrow, rocky way, where, after advancing for a short distance, they found themselves in front of a staircase of most peculiar construction, being composed of pieces of stone of all shapes and sizes, and bits of iron to hold them together.

"Where does that lead to?" asked Jack, anxiously, for he had begun now to see the drift of events.

"It leads up to the summit of the cliff," said Marcos.

"Can you find this place inland without much difficulty?"

"Aye, as easily as by water," said Marcos; "now what we have to do is, during the next two days, to get this cave provisioned, and then you must endeavor to bring the two ladies here."

"Yes—and then?"

"Before I answer that, I must ask have you any money?"

"Well," said Jack, "we have nothing to speak of. Between the three of us we cannot muster more than thirty pounds in English gold."

The face of the Abyssinian brightened at once.

"That is a small fortune for what I want!" he said; "the next thing is to go down to the town with me and find a dozen hardy sailors—men who care for nothing—and engage them. We will bring them here, and while the ceremony is taking place up at the Greek chapel, we must cut out the brig, so that when Leoni brings his bride aboard, he will find the vessel in the hands of you and your friends; then the battle must be hand to hand, and knife to knife."

"This is a good idea," said Jack, his heart warming at the thought of returning to Italy as the captor of the *Thunder*. "When shall we proceed to work?"

"To-morrow morning," said Marcos. "Deep, deep down in my heart is a great hatred for Demetrius, and I will work to destroy him and his plans."

"We had better return now," said Jack, who was anxious to see Emily, and as far as his regard for safety allowed, explain to her the danger which surrounded them.

"Yes," replied Marcos. "Now success depends on silence."

As they passed the black hull of the brig, Alfieri from the deck hailed them.

"We are going to the town," cried Jack.

"Come aboard," shouted Alfieri, "and look at the crew."

"Sick of the sea, and crews too," said Jack, in apparent good humor; "want rest for a while."

As the boat neared the beach a sudden and most terrible change came over the face of nature.

The sky grew dark in patches, save where it seemed blood-red, and a cold wind swept over the face of the sea.

The waves suddenly rose on each side, and lashed the shore savagely.

"What is the meaning of this?" cried Jack, in some alarm.

"It portends an earthquake," cried Marcos. "My revenge is nearer than I thought."

CHAPTER XXV.

PREPARING FOR THE BATTLE.

GREAT excitement naturally reigned in Chios when the signs of the dreaded earthquake made their appearance.

But the minds of Jack and his friends were, of course, agitated by far different emotions.

Demetrius seemed boisterously anxious to seem friendly.

Jack, however, was not entirely to be put off.

"I am going now to see the ladies," said Jack. "I have something of great importance to tell the younger one; but how have you succeeded in regard to the crew? I am all anxiety."

"I have succeeded well," said Alfieri, "but I fear you will not be able to sail for three days. However, you will know better than I do when you are introduced to the crew."

"Tell me, are all the crew you have engaged Greeks?"

"No; there are one or two Spaniards and one or two Italians," said Alfieri; "the latter you will be able to speak to."

"Yes; I shall go on board either this evening or to-morrow," said Jack, "and have a look round. I suppose you have given directions that a place should be got ready for the English ladies?"

"No, I have left that also for you," said the priest.

The Abyssinian was standing just behind Demetrius and Alfieri as the latter spoke, and a grave look—a look of stern warning—passed over his features.

"Oh, very well," said Jack, "I will, as I said, go on board either this evening or to-morrow, and see that all is well. In fact, as I am going to speak to them now, or rather to the Signora Emily, in regard to our projected walk to-morrow, I can arrange for her to accompany me."

"Certainly; it would be better so," said the priest.

And no more was said.

Jack proceeded now to the lower room, after making an appointment with Ben Brace and Tom Meadows to meet them on the shore at a certain time.

He found Emily alone, looking over some books. Lydia was in the adjoining room.

The young girl greeted him with a pleased smile.

"Oh, I have such good news for you," she said. "My sister Lydia, I am happy to say, is much better."

"Better," said Jack; "I do not know whether to think this good news or bad. It may be an excuse for all kinds of villainy. Her illness has up to this time proved her only safeguard."

"But is danger still afloat?"

"Yes," said Jack, in a low voice; "yes, there is great danger. I can scarcely explain to you now, but I will to-morrow when we go out for our walk. I fear to speak in this place. The very walls seem to have ears. Be ready as soon as you have partaken of breakfast, and we will stroll out on the beach. If your sister is well enough bring her, too, and we will not return to this house."

These last words were whispered close into the young girl's ear, accompanied by a kiss, and then Jack hastened up to the room where he had left Demetrius and Alfieri.

Both were absent.

Only Marcos remained, looking gloomily out of the window.

He turned eagerly as Jack entered.

Our hero was struck by his wild and despairing look.

"What is the matter?" asked Jack.

"Ah! they are all traitors! Even my wife, Fatima," muttered Marcos. "But no matter, we must defeat them!"

"Where is Alfieri?"

"Gone on board the *Thunder*."

"And Demetrius?"

"Gone into the town of Chiopolis."

"That is where I am going," said Jack.

"For what purpose?"

"To try if I cannot find a home in the city with some English or Italian person where I can place my friends until an English ship touches here. Your plan I will take up if my own fails."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Marcos.

"Yes," replied Jack, "if it will not excite suspicion. It is strange that they have not suspected you, considering how suspicious they are."

"No; it is not strange to me," said Marcos. "Demetrius has trusted me, but in the face of the wrong he is doing to me I am keeping my vengeance so hidden that he does not even guess that I know anything of it. But when the hour of revenge comes he will find me terrible."

As he spoke his eyes gleamed with a savage fire.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FASTENED IN—HOURS OF SUSPENSE.

JACK was soon on the beach with Ben Brace and Tom Meadows.

There was no one now within earshot, and accordingly Jack determined at once to come to some definite conclusion as to how they were to act.

"I am certain it will be best for us," he said, "to cast aside all idea of going to Italy in the *Thunder*."

"Well, that's just what I think," said Ben Brace. "I don't know what it is, but I've a notion that there's a trap being laid for us."

"Yes," said Tom Meadows, "so have I. I've been telling Ben how I dreamed last night that we all went to sea in a big ship, and how, when we were right out in mid-ocean, the whole of the bottom of the vessel gave way, and down we all went to Davy Jones' locker."

"Old Nick fly away with your dreams!" cried Ben Brace. "I don't believe in them things."

"Ah, you would," said Tom, "if you'd gone through so much of it as I have. Why, I remember dreaming when I was home at the old farm that Johnny Atkins broke his leg when he was stealing father's apples; and dash my buttons if next day it didn't happen!"

"Come, come, comrades," said Jack, who had for the moment been observing through his small spy-glass the movements of the men on board the pirate vessel, "don't let's waste time in talking about dreams. What I mean is this—that there is villainy and murder about this place, and I am going to seek another asylum for our lady friends."

"True," said Marcos. "The sooner you are out of the tigers' den the better."

"True," said Jack; "and so my plan is this—to-morrow Lydia must accompany me and her sister when we go out for our much-talked-of walk. When our absence is discovered we can defy our enemies better in a new place."

"Good, Master Jack," said Brace. "Let's go at once."

They accordingly made their way towards the little town.

Fortune seemed to smile upon our hero that day.

Happening to mention his requirements to a fat Greek, who, seated on a big stone near a somewhat ruined house, was lazily consuming cigarettes, he was introduced to an English woman.

The matter was, without much difficulty, arranged at once.

Everything seemed progressing properly for their escape.

When night came they retired to bed, easy in their minds, and convinced that the first portion of the game was to going be won without having to strike a blow.

Morning came, and at the usual hour they proceeded to the door which led to the stairs.

It resisted their efforts to open it.

"How's this?" cried Jack. "Are we before our time?"

A more terrible thought leaped into his brains. Treachery!

They were trapped.

But he feared to name his thoughts.

"Something's up, I expect," said Ben Brace. "Let's try the other way out."

He meant the door by which they reached the subterranean way leading to the trap-door under the promontory.

He did try it.

But in vain!

That also was locked on the outside.

Trapped again!

The three glanced at each other.

What was the meaning of it all?

Were they indeed caged?

Had they allowed themselves to be lulled into a fool's paradise?

They naturally ere they spoke took a rapid survey of the walls.

Like most of the houses they were of stone. There seemed no possible chance of forcing an escape.

"Marcos has betrayed us, after all," said Jack. "Serve me right for trusting one of his race."

Ben Brace shook his head.

"Don't be hasty, Master Jack," he said. "I don't set myself up for being very clever, but I think I know a man by his face when I see him. Perhaps Marcos has been murdered or imprisoned, but he's not a traitor."

Jack and his friends were getting quite desperate.

They knocked loudly and more loudly at the doors, and shouted at the top of their voices, but no reply came.

The hours flew by.

Except a few biscuits and a bottle of very inferior Greek wine, they had nothing in the way of refreshment.

The room also was lighted by a now fast failing lamp, for the hole high up in the wall through which the place was ventilated allowed scarcely a ray of sunlight to penetrate into the chamber.

"I don't know what to think," said Ben Brace. "This 'ere affair does look very fishy; and yet I do not think Marcos is in it. I fancy he's caught, too."

"He may have no doubt a difficult part to play," said Jack; "but yet I shall believe in him better when I have seen him, and heard from his own lips that he is true."

Time went on apace.

Jack's mind was terribly on the rack.

Every half hour brought nearer the consummating tragedy in the Greek chapel.

What was to be done?

He searched in every part of the room in vain.

There seemed no chance whatever of escape.

"Well," he said to Ben Brace, "the only thing I can think of is to fire my pistol into the lock of the door. That may burst it; but even then it may be barred on the outside."

"Try anything," said Ben Brace. "Nothing can be so bad as such suspense as this."

Jack lost no time in the trial.

He chose the door which led to the subterranean passage, as by means of that they might make their way into the open air without running the risk of being detained in the upper rooms of Demetrius' house.

But it was of no avail.

The bullet crashed through the lock, destroying it, but it was of no use.

On the outer side the door was heavily barred.

The same was tried with the second door.

But with the same result, and Jack sat down in despair.

His heart was full now of the most terrible feelings.

He thought of the unfortunate girls at the mercy of the two traitors.

As hour upon hour went by, the time approached when the hateful marriage ceremony was to take place in the Greek chapel, and with no one to help the poor girls their position would be awful to dream of.

Horrible it was indeed to contemplate the fact that they would be dragged off to the place without a friend to aid them, or even to speak to them in their distress.

He could not bear to think of it calmly, and as darkness approached he paced the room excitedly.

Suddenly, in the midst of his utter despair, there was a sound on the stairs.

It was a man's heavy footstep.

"Look to your arms, comrades!" cried Jack, in excited tones, as he drew his pistols from his belt. "Let us sell our lives dearly, if treachery is afloat."

"I'm ready, Master Jack; I'll stand by you to the death."

"And so will I," cried Tom. "I'll show the rascals what an English lad can do."

And they stood on each side of Jack, watching the door, and in a few moments it opened.

But not to admit an enemy.

It was Marcos.

"Quick! follow me!" he said, in a sharp, hurried voice.

"Whither?" asked Jack, suspiciously.

"What! do you begin to think me a traitor?" asked the Abyssinian, in a pained tone.

"I have not known what to think," said Jack. "Being left here locked in during all these hours does not make one feel very trusting or confident."

"We are going straight to the chapel where the ceremony is intended to take place. Have faith

in me; all may yet be well," said the Abyssinian. "The ceremony will not take place until ten o'clock at night, but though it is only seven now we had better start at once, in order that we may be able to conceal ourselves."

He made a movement as if to lead the way.

"Stay!" cried Jack, in a sharp tone. "In the first place, where are Mrs. Harden and her sister?"

"They were taken away early to-day," replied Marcos. "I believe they are in the priest's house. Demetrius was put on his guard against you by your foolish countrywoman."

"What! she a traitress also?" said Jack.

"No; but when she found that you did not bring round the ladies this morning as you promised, she came to find out the reason, and so he learned the fact that you were going to quit the place. This was the reason why you have been kept prisoners."

"But when we reach the chapel what are we to do then?" asked Jack.

"We must take our stand near the altar," said Marcos; "there, hidden behind the pillars, we can see all who enter. Then we can rush suddenly upon the marriage party and do our best."

"Good; lead on then," said Jack. "In Heaven's name, lead on!"

The Abyssinian led the way once more along the subterranean passage, and opening the trap-door, admitted them without delay to the open air.

It was very dark, far more dark than it should be at such an hour in such a clime.

Far over the sea were banks of black clouds, mixed with a reddish brown, while over the high-mountaining waves came a hot air which seemed to take the breath away and to be fierce enough to scorch up all vegetation.

"What does this mean?" said Jack, glancing round with something like awe.

"It means that the time of the wicked has come; that there will be an earthquake within a few hours, and that vengeance will fall upon those who have been planning evil deeds."

"That may be," said Jack with a shudder, "but with them will be engulfed also the innocent. We must lose no time."

They could see, as they passed along the beach in the direction of the chapel, the lights of the pirate ship *Thunder* rising and falling, pitching to and fro, under the influence of the coming storm.

"We shall have a rough night of it at any rate," said Marcos. "If we save the women, I do not see how we can effect their escape. In such a sea a boat, which is the only thing we can depend upon getting, would not live a minute."

"We will think of that afterwards," said Jack; "let us first get the two beautiful English girls out of the clutches of those ruffians. Tom, Ben, you will stand by me?"

"We'll be true as steel," cried Ben.

"Never fear, Jack," cried Tom, "but we'll stand by you to the death."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GREEK CHAPEL—THE EARTHQUAKE—A SWIFT REVENGE.

THE Greek chapel where the sacrifice was to take place was an edifice of a peculiar shape—that of a high, wide cross—and was in some places nearly covered by a growth of some plant like ivy.

There was a dim light now in one of the upper rooms, which were occupied at times by the priest.

All else was in total darkness, save for the ruddy reflections cast upon the windows by the red clouds of the coming storm.

Out at sea everything looked wondrously grand.

Little notice did Jack, however, take of the scene around him, for his thoughts were bound up entirely in the Greek chapel and the events which he feared would be soon taking place there.

No one seemed anywhere near to observe them, and so, without much hesitation, they passed on, and entered the sacred edifice.

All was still, and a profound darkness also reigned over everything.

A solemn place, indeed.

There was not a sign yet of any one approaching the altar from any part of the edifice, and they accordingly made their way towards it.

As they did so they saw the mockery of the whole affair.

The altar was decorated as for a willing bride.

Jack's blood curdled at all this.

He clutched Marcos by the arm.

"Heavens!" he said, "can such villains as I have to deal with believe in religion at all?"

Marcos shrugged his shoulders.

"Ay!" he said, "while they have priests like Alfieri to give them absolution. But come this way."

Guided by Marcos, who seemed to have a more than usual determination in all this, they were soon hidden by the huge pillars behind the altar.

"Remain here," cried the Abyssinian, in a whisper. "Do not move, whoever comes, for they cannot dream of you being here unless you make a noise."

"Where are you going?" asked Jack.

"To obtain better weapons than we have," said Marcos; "weapons with which we can kill at a distance."

He did not wait to discuss the matter.

Before even Jack could answer him he had gone.

But he was not long absent.

As our hero and his friends waited anxiously, with their hands upon their pistols and swords, he glided back to them.

In his grasp were four muskets of the best pattern to be found in those days.

"Now," he said, "be ready, and fear not."

The time went on slowly now.

The hours passed on leaden wings.

Presently, however, there was a slight indication of light in a far-off corner.

"They come," whispered Marcos, "but let me give the signal when to fire. Let the unholy ceremony progress, let the wretches think they are in possession of all they desire, and then destroy them and their hopes forever."

It was but fair to accede to the request of Marcos.

They could all see that there was more in his resolution of revenge against these men than mere desire that his English friends should contrive the escape of the two unfortunate ladies.

They had seen a little of his vengeance against Demetrius, and his mad love and now hatred of Fatima.

That was enough.

The hour came at last.

The lights shone, as we have said, dimly in a corner.

Then some figures appeared.

The high priest advanced first.

Then slowly after came the two girls.

The one was evidently drugged.

The other was positively in a state of insensibility to all around, although she was able to walk along with assistance.

Marcos clutched Jack by the arm suddenly.

"See," he cried, "did I not tell you aright? There is Fatima, my treacherous wife, with them."

As he spoke there was a terrific clap of thunder, and the chapel seemed to rock to its very foundations.

Marcos stood perfectly still—his eyes fixed on Fatima.

The wedding party, in spite of the terrible signs of the coming storm, advanced towards the altar.

Demetrius appeared after a moment, followed by two Greeks, and the last on the scene was Leoni, the pirate.

Yes.

There was no doubt about it.

It was in very truth Leoni, the pirate, the man who was supposed to have been lost in the burning of the vessel, during his fierce sea-flight with Ralph, the Avenger.

"We will fire," said Jack, in an undertone to Ben Brace, "then, while they are in confusion, we will rush in and rescue the ladies. This must be a battle to the death. It must be the end of all our miseries, one way or the other."

"Then why not pick them off as they stand there?" said Ben. "That would be an end of all the trouble."

"Because I cannot commit murder, even when we have such ruffians to deal with as these," returned Jack. "I should care little who was killed if it came to an indiscriminate battle. Now, then, I'll take Leoni."

But it was not to be.

At the moment they raised their muskets to their shoulders, there was a tremendous rocking of the ground, and one of the walls of the chapel fell in with a crash, revealing through the open space the red angry sky, illumined each moment by the vengeful flashes of the violet lightning.

The wedding party stood aghast.

More aghast still were they, when one report after another rang through the sacred edifice.

It was impossible, however, to aim with any kind of precision in the strange light that prevailed.

With a cry, Jack and his followers rushed forward.

But it was of no avail.

The earthquake was upon them with a vengeance.

The two unhappy girls had sunk, lethargic, on

the rent and fallen altar, the priest and his acolytes clung terror-stricken to the holy emblems, over which the light of the lamps shone dimly in comparison to the rapid flashes of lightning.

Leoni the pirate and his two companions stood erect and defiant, while Fatima leaned against a pillar near Demetrius.

Alfieri the monk was nowhere to be seen.

Our friends made a dash over the broken floor, when there was another shock.

This time a more terrible one.

The roof of the temple came crashing down around them.

"We must seize the two women and leave the rest to their fate," cried Ben Brace. "I can't see you stand here, Master Jack, to be crushed to death."

They were about to make a dash, but at this instant an awful thing happened.

Some of the masonry shifted its position, and Marcos was caught between two jagged pieces, his limbs being crushed up to the waist.

He gave one terrible cry.

Then Fatima, in the excess of her terror, rushed to Demetrius, and threw herself into her arms.

"Save me, save me, Demetrius!" she cried. "There is Marcos waiting for revenge."

He was already in the agonies of death.

He knew well that he had not long to live; but his aim was good and true, and the faithless wife fell dead.

Marcos, without a word, then snatched another musket from the hands of Tom Meadows and again fired, this time bringing Demetrius down.

Then the musket fell from his hand.

In his act of vengeance his last atom of strength had given way, and he could battle no further.

It was a scene now of the most terrible confusion.

Leoni and his men being on the side of the mass of ruins where the two girls lay as still as in death, made an attempt to secure them, even in the face of Jack and his friends, and the elements, which seemed favorable to them.

In a few moments, however, Jack and his two companions had made their way over the barrier, and in the midst of the rocking of the earth, the raging of the tempest, and the flashing of the lightning, a desperate conflict commenced.

Jack saw at once the absurd folly of this.

"Are you mad, pirate?" he cried; "does your infatuation carry you so far that you desire to see those innocent women buried in the ruins? Why not bear them first from this scene of inevitable destruction, and then try your arm against mine, if you dare?"

"Let it be so, boy," said Leoni, as he lowered his weapon. "I will carry one of the signoras, you the other."

He bent down as he spoke and raised Lydia Harden in his strong grasp.

Jack did the same by Emily, and in a few moments they were out in the open air, whither the priest and his acolytes had fled immediately after the deaths of Demetrius and Fatima.

As they made their way to a spot some fifty yards from the chapel, there was another shock, and the whole building came with one tremendous crash to the ground.

The sky was now blood-red in some parts, and in some parts black as ink; the ground was rocking to and fro; the town of Chiopolis, as they plainly saw from the eminence, was in many places in flames.

Yet, in spite of all—in spite of all the terrible warnings of nature, the pirates, as soon as the two girls were deposited in safety, attacked our hero and his friends with intense fury.

"Rash boy! Either I or you die this night!" cried Leoni, fiercely, as he crossed swords with Jack.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FIGHT ON THE CLIFF—AGAIN IN THE HANDS OF THE FOE.

DESPERATELY indeed raged that battle on the cliff, while the two helpless causes of it lay unconscious of all that proceeded.

A hopeless fight indeed it seemed to Jack, now that Marcos was dead.

The Abyssinian had appeared to be, as it were, a link between him and safety, and even if Leoni and his companions were defeated, there appeared little chance of escaping from the island while Alfieri and the other ruffians were in possession of the *Thunder*, and perhaps even then ashore.

Alfieri being a friend of Leoni's, he naturally classed among the pirates, and he could only account for his absence by supposing that he was

engaged on some villainous business for the chief.

While the struggle proceeded, the warring of nature still went on.

The lightning flashed from one edge of the horizon to the other—dark, ponderous banks of clouds rolled across the heavens, black as Erebus at one end and red as blood at the other.

Here and there were strange rifts in the sky, looking as if the vault itself were opening, while the sea continued to roll in one black, continuous, surging wave towards the island, dashing against the rocks in thunderous roarings.

Jack could see that the chapel was on fire.

It was a horrible scene.

People half-dressed flying through the rocking streets to seek shelter in the fields and on the hill slopes.

From all these dangers, from toppling steeples and the conflagrations consequent upon the general disaster, Jack and his companions were free.

But yet, as they fought hand to hand with their desperate foes, they could feel the earth rock and sway beneath their feet.

Neither in his heart nor in that of Ben Brace or Tom Meadows was there any thought of fear.

Their only anxiety was to defeat their enemies, and secure the safety of the two unfortunate girls, even if their own lives paid the forfeit.

They seemed in very truth to be getting the best of the battle, when suddenly a long shrill note was heard.

It was like the note of a boatswain's whistle, and came from far down below the cliffs.

In an instant Leoni answered it with his lips.

Jack's heart sank within him.

There were evidently reinforcements coming to the pirates.

Nevertheless his courage did not fail him.

He attacked the foe indeed with more fury than ever, and urged his friends more fiercely to the conflict.

"Come on, Ben, show them how to use British steel!" he cried; "they've some more vagabonds coming up to help 'em! Come on, Tom."

"Aye, aye. We'll conquer or die!" came from both.

But from very exhausted lungs.

Both of them, in fact, were desperately wounded, and Jack, too, was suffering from a gash in the left arm.

It may be all very well to say that soldiers in the heat of action do not think of their wounds, or, at any rate, the pain of them.

But they cannot help feeling the loss of blood, and all three of our friends were rapidly becoming faint.

They had now only three pirates remaining to contend with, for they had placed the others *hors de combat*, but Leoni and the two who were left to him were more than a match for the blue-jackets in their exhausted state if the battle lasted long.

But it did not.

They had not, in fact, the chance of seeing how long they could carry on the conflict, for in a few moments after Leoni had answered the whistle, there was a rush of feet behind them, and they found themselves surrounded by as pretty a crew of ruffians as ever it had been their lot to behold.

Greeks, Dalmatians, Italians, French, all seemed included in that hideous gang, though, of course, there is little time to think who and what they were.

It was self-evident, of course, that they formed some of the newly-made crew of the *Thunder*, for at a short order given by Leoni they made a dash at Jack and his friends, who, after a vain, though desperate struggle, found themselves prisoners.

They were flung bound upon the ground, while the pirate and his crew held a consultation.

"Can we go on board at once, Gaspard?" said the pirate, Leoni.

"No one can go on board," said the man; "no boat can live, no boat, in fact, can be launched. We must remain on shore until the sea is calmer."

"*Corpo di bacco!*" said Leoni; "what is to become of the *Thunder*, then? She will drive ashore."

"No; I have signaled her to go out to sea," said Gaspard; "the ocean may be calmer by morning, and she will return to her anchorage."

"Where can we find refuge for the night, then?" said Leoni. "The women here will die, exposed longer to the tempest."

"We cannot take them into the town," said Gaspard, "for they would stand there but little chance of life among the falling ruins, and the yawning streets. We must place them near the rocks yonder, and improvise a sort of tent."

Leoni glanced in the direction pointed out.

There was a high wall of black rock, slightly leaning over at the summit.

"But that might fall, too, amid all this upheaving of nature," he said.

Gaspard shrugged his shoulders.

"So might the earth here open at our feet," he said; "but I will away, and fetch the sail-cloths. Do you bear the women to shelter."

With the aid of others Emily and her sister were carried away, and placed beneath the rock, where they were sheltered somewhat from the rain and wind.

"What are we to do with this carrion?" asked one of the pirates, pointing to Jack and his friends. "Shall we fling them over into the sea?"

"No—no," said Leoni. "That would be showing them too much favor. No. They have fooled me, foiled me, annoyed and injured me in every way; stood between myself and triumph always secure, at the very moment I imagined myself most secure and they shall be punished for it by torture."

"In what way?"

"At dawn I will fasten them by ropes, and leave them dangling from the rocks, where they will starve to death," said Leoni, in a hissing tone of fury. "Round this point ships very seldom pass, and they will have no chance of being saved. They shall have a slow but sure death."

"Cruel and heartless villain!" thought Jack; "but I will not ask for mercy."

"If they lie here all night, just as we've flung 'em down," said the other pirate, "they'll save ye any further trouble, I think. *Cospetto!* They're bundled up together like a lot of dead fowls in a bag."

"True. I would not have them die yet," said Leoni. "I should lose the treat to which I have been looking forward. Raiset them up, and if you have any spirits give them some, so that they can outlive the night for my revenge."

"I have some," said the man, and with the assistance of one or two of his companions, he raised our hero and his friends so that they could rest their backs against a ledge of rock.

"We thank you," said Jack, faintly, in Italian; "and now give to us the spirit which the villain Leoni, your master, said we were to have."

The man started back.

"St. Peter!" he cried; "then you heard all?"

"Yes. I understand Italian," said Jack; "and I am aware of the fate to which we are doomed. But death can come but once, therefore why not then? Yet, if you have one spark of human kindness left in your breast, place us nearer to one another in order that we may be able to talk, if it be for the last time."

"The devil fly away with me," said the man, "if ever any one accused me of being a brute before. I have never been a pirate yet, if my leader is one. I am only an Italian sailor, with nothing to do, and not overburdened with scruples. Hang me if I can approve of what the captain's going to do, but I can't help it. If I objected he'd only put a bullet through my head."

"True," said Jack. "Give me the refreshment I ask, and let my friends be near me. That is all I ask."

"Good, signor."

The man at once shifted Ben Brace and Tom Meadows, in spite of sundry ejaculations, unintelligible to him, from the sailor, to the effect that he was to keep his weather-eye open and not bundle them about as if they were flotsam and jetsam.

"We ain't come to that yet, ye know, ye long-bearded son of a sea-cook!" shouted Ben. "Mind what ye're about, ye lubber."

"Hush, Ben," cried Jack. "He can't understand what you are saying, but it is very easy for him to tell by your voice and manner that you're bullying him. And he's doing us a service, indeed he is."

"All right, sir," said Ben; "only these 'ere rocks ain't cushions, and I ain't done much thumpin' in my time, and while I've got something left to sit on I might as well keep it in good order as not."

"Just so, Ben; only be quiet. He'll give ye something to do ye good in a moment."

"Well, shiver my timbers," cried the old tar, "I could just do with a drop o' rum. I feel that faint from loss o' blood that my head swims round like a cobble, and as for these 'ere wounds o' mine, the wind goes whistling into 'em at that rate, that if I ain't lucky, I'll be having screw-matics before the morning."

The Italian here handed Jack a flask containing a full pint of strong spirit.

Jack took a goodly draught, and by the time it had been passed round it was empty.

"The Signori Inglesi like spirit," said the man dolefully. "Well, well, it is your last night on earth, no doubt, for you will die hanging out to the winds like scare-crows. So I will not begrudge you what you have taken."

Presently, at Jack's earnest entreaty, he bound up their wounds, and then they were left to

themselves, in pain, in despair; hopeless and awaiting what seemed a certain doom.

When the man went away the other pirates had made their dispositions for the night.

Jack could see by the light of the torches that Emily and her sister had recovered consciousness, that they were supplied with refreshments, and were then secluded from all view of the pirates by a tent improvised, as Gaspard had said, in the most rude manner out of some sail-cloths.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A TALK, A PLOT, AND A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

"BEN."

The word was uttered by Jack in a very low voice, but Ben answered quickly—

"Yes, Master Jack."

"We are alone now," said Jack; "and even if we were to speak Italian, no doubt we should not be overheard. But still, we will speak low, and in short sentences, so that we shall not be noticed so much."

"All right, Master Jack."

"In the first place, Ben, and you too, Tom, Leoni is keeping us for a cruel fate."

"Just like the brute," growled Ben. "And pray what is it?"

"We're to be kept here till dawn."

"Ugh!"

"And then we are to be lowered over the edge of the cliff by ropes, and left there dangling in the broiling sun like scarecrows."

"Scarecrows!" cried Tom Meadows. "I wish I was building 'em up in my fayther's fields, or scaring the crows myself. I'm an unfortunate chap altogether. I don't think as I shall ever come to sea any more if I do escape, even if you do, Master Jack."

"You won't have the chance," growled Ben.

"I don't know so much about that," said Jack cheerily, "if you only do what I tell you. I've been thinking over matters, and I can't see that there would be any chance of saving these ladies, even if we were free this instant, without help from other quarters. What do you think, Ben?"

"I think you're right, sir. It's awful to think of them 'ere innercents in the maws of them sharks, but, Lor' a-mussy, we're as helpless as a Yarmouth herrin'-smack a-tryin' to run down a French man-o'-war."

"What say you, Tom?"

Tom Meadows had got a tender point in his heart, and when he answered, it was easy to detect the emotion in his voice.

"It's a dreadful business altogether," he said, "and though I'd like to see the old farm again, and fayther and mother and Gracie Dodfield, as I was to marry when I was one-and-twenty, dang me, if I wouldn't give my life to see those two poor girls free and happy."

"Well," said Jack, "I'm not going to ask you to give your life for them; but I'm going to ask you to risk it again."

"Fifty times, if I had the chance," said Tom Meadows.

"Ay, ay," said Ben Brace. "Forge ahead, master. I'm bothered if ye haven't made my blood run swift as one o'clock, for it looks as if ye saw a rift in the squally sky."

At this moment there was a roar as of thunder.

The earth shook.

The rock against which they leaned trembled.

"Pray Heaven, we are not engulfed," said Jack, devoutly, "and that we shall have a chance of doing our duty once more."

"Amen!" cried both his comrades.

They waited in awe, expecting another shock.

But it came not, and Jack proceeded:

"Well, boys, if we wait until morning, we're doomed to die, are we not?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Well, then, a little hazard more or less doesn't matter, does it?"

"Not a rope's-end," said Ben Brace.

"No," went on Jack. "I saw the pirates when they fetched those sails creep away down to the shore, so there must be boats there."

"Good," said Ben.

"Well, then, my plan is this," said Jack, naturally dropping his voice at this point in his story and glancing furtively round him, "I will fall over presently and cut the bonds that bind you. Then you must release me and Tom, and the rest is easy."

"Easy, Master Jack?"

"Ay! I heard these pirates say that the *Thunder* had been signaled to go out to sea, and that no boat could live among these wide rolling billows. We have no such fear. If we remain here we die; if we try to seize a boat and cast ourselves on the mercy of the ocean, we have at least a chance for life."

"Shiver my timbers! it's a pity if you didn't

live to be a post-captain," said Ben Brace. "You've got a head-piece like old Nelson. Have at ye, cap'n, as I shall call ye now. Go ahead; we're with ye."

"Here goes, then!" said Jack.

And as he spoke he heeled over, so that he came just on Ben's right arm, near the cords.

He was soon engaged in cutting the cords with a small clasp-knife.

It was a tedious job, but at length the cords which bound Ben's right arm were loosened, and he began to loosen the others.

Ben, once released, it took but little time to place the other two in a like position.

They were soon ready for their new venture, and presently, in the darkness, they crept down towards the shore.

It was a grand sight there.

The sea was pouring in great waves upon the beach, looking like huge black mountains crested with silver, while here and there were belts of red light where the reflections of the city conflagrations fell across the sea.

But Jack and his friends did not pause to look at any of the beauties of the scene.

They only saw with delight that there was a big boat lying on the strand, high up above the water, with a mast, sail, and oars.

"Providence has given us the very thing that we wanted," said Jack. "Ah! Ben, perhaps we may be able to beat them yet, and save these unfortunate girls after all."

Then his heart yearned towards the rude sail-tent by the rocks where his loved one was.

Young as he was, Emily was all in all to him.

He had been placed with her in such strange situations—had gone through such miseries and perils for her sake, that it seemed as if they had been friends and sweethearts all their lives."

"Oh, Emily, Emily! Good-bye, good-bye!" he cried frantically; "I go to save you. Oh, think not that we have forsaken you! No! We will either come back to you and save you, or we will take a deadly revenge."

At this moment there was a loud sound from far out at sea.

Boom!

"Hark!" cried Jack.

"I heard it," said Ben; "it was a ship's gun."

"There she goes again!" cried Tem Meadows.

"There's a fight somewhere," exclaimed Jack; "we'll make towards it. French or Italian, they won't be such villains as those we have left."

"Now, then," said Ben, "we'll have to be quick, for they'll be roused up by this booming of cannon, and discover our flight. The sail is ready to be hoisted—jump aboard and I'll run her down to meet that big wave. Here she goes; steady, boys!"

It was indeed a big wave that met it, and had not Ben shouted "Up sail!" before he leaped in, the boat would have been flung again high and dry on the beach.

As it was, the somewhat big sail caught the tremendous side wind coming round the cliffs, and sent her high up on the crest of the billows.

She did not make at once for the open sea. This could not be expected.

It was enough for them that they were skimming along the shore, and that too at a spanking pace.

It was something to be off shore at all.

Presently they heard loud shouts.

The night was still supremely dark; but in the fitful light thrown across the beach by the flames of the still burning city they could see many figures dashing down to the shore.

There were other boats there, and they had not taken the precaution to stave them in.

But they were confident that they had secured the best craft, and the only one in which the sails had been left.

Consequently all fear of pursuit seemed ridiculous.

Indeed, when Leoni found the real state of affairs, he forbade such an attempt.

In fact, he laughed grimly.

"Let them go," he said; "what care I? I have the two women, and with them I am content. Moreover, the boat cannot possibly live in this sea."

But, as if to mock his words, the boat, as soon as they had fairly settled in her, tacked beautifully, and went skimming over the rolling ocean with the grace of a sea-bird.

Ben Brace kept a good lookout for a vessel. Presently he saw a bright flash.

"There she goes—there she blows! as we used to say in the old whaling days!" cried he; "we'll make for that, and see if we can't make friends."

"That's right, Ben," said Jack; "I wish we could hoist more sail."

"Ah, Master Jack," cried the old sailer, "let her be. She's got enough on her now quite

enough with this 'ere wind; and see, she's going along like a beauty."

There was no mistake about it.

The little craft was leaping along beautifully, skimming over the waves as if laughing to scorn the oncoming of the huge billows.

Right away she went in the teeth of the wind, and directing her course straight in the direction of the spot where the two vessels were engaged in combat.

Long before they reached the point of action one of the combatants caught fire, and over the sea and sky was spread a vivid crimson flush.

"This puts me in mind of that other fight between the two pirate vessels," said Jack, "when we were on the pirates' island. What if the conquering vessel should be the vessel which brought Leoni here."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Ben Brace; "but that ain't the way to look at it. We must hope for the best. Perhaps it's a British vessel, and then hurrah, say I, for Old England!"

"What do you mean?" cried Jack. "You mean to say that you're looking forward to the chance of going home?"

Ben glanced at him reproachfully.

"Now that isn't fair, Master Jack," he said. "I couldn't be wishing to go home, and those poor girls on that 'ere island with all them wretches. No, I meant that we were all safe if we found ourselves under the British flag; safe for ourselves, and safe for the women too."

The vessel was now burning so fiercely that they could plainly see the hull of the other ship as it moved slowly away, to avoid, no doubt, the chance of an explosion.

The fugitives at once shaped their course so that the boat should pass under the bows of the big ship.

"Oh, if she should sail off before we can reach her!" cried Jack.

At this thought, his own heart, as well as those of his companions, almost ceased to beat, for in that case who could tell what might be their doom?

Our heroes seemed to be in luck's way.

Long before an order was given to make all sail, they were close to the victorious vessel, and in reply to their hail a voice answered them in English.

An exclamation of wonder and pleasure broke from Ben Brace.

"Oh, Master Jack! Did ye hear that?"

"I did," cried Jack, gleefully. "Snip ahoy!"

"Where away?"

"Under the port bow."

In a few moments lights were seen at the side of the vessel, and it was not long before the boat had hitched on by the chains, and Jack and his comrades were clambering up.

As soon as they were on deck, however, they saw the mistake they had made.

A mistake which caused them to draw back in wonder and horror.

The first person whose face they saw was Ralph the Avenger, and one by one they recognized many of his crew.

Ralph Howard burst into a loud laugh as he beheld Jack and his companions.

Of course he knew nothing of the presence of our hero and his men on the island, or of the fact that he had aided the two ladies to escape.

He had neither seen nor heard of Jack Gale since the hour when the two girls had been treacherously taken on board the *Thunder* and Ernest Harden had been flung overboard into the sea.

All this, of course, flashed through the minds of our hero and his companions, and they resolved to shape their conduct accordingly.

"You are surprised to see us, but why do you laugh?" said Jack.

"Because, my lad, you have walked straight into the lion's mouth."

"How is that?" said Jack, who, of course, was supposed to know nothing of the *Thunder* and its adventures.

"Well, well, my lad, I can explain that another time," said Howard; "but tell me, how is it we find you cruising about on this stormy sea in an open boat?"

"It is rather a long story," said Jack, "but I may tell you at once that we have just made our escape from Leoni the pirate and his desperadoes."

A gray pallor overspread the face of Ralph Howard at the name of the pirate.

"Leoni!" he cried. "What mean you? He has long since answered to me for his crimes. His ship was blown up after an engagement with my vessel, and all on board perished, save an old priest, who, I believe, played me false."

"Nevertheless, we have but just left him," said Jack. "If you will let the wants of my men be seen to, and will give me a few moments'

conversation in your cabin, I will tell you much that you wish to know."

Jack had made up his mind what to do. Ralph Howard he knew to be a desperate pirate.

But he was of a far different stamp to Leoni. Lydia and Emily might be in danger on board the ship of which Ralph Howard was captain, but not in such danger as when in the power of the Italian.

There was a fierce devil raging in the breast of Ralph Howard, but there was a certain amount of chivalry in his composition which was entirely absent from the other.

At any rate, when Leoni regarded Lydia as almost his wife, after the partial ceremony which had been carried out in the Greek chapel, there was no knowing what peril she was in.

He resolved accordingly to tell the English pirate captain as much of his adventures as was absolutely necessary, and induce him, if possible, to save the young girls from the island of Chios.

In this case they would, at any rate, be on the same vessel as Jack and his comrades, and something might unexpectedly turn up to aid them in escape.

It was rather a hazardous proceeding. He knew the fierce temper of the English pirate, and what he would be likely to expect.

But he had faith also in his own courage, and had no fear of results.

Howard did not hesitate a moment.

He, of course, was eager to hear all in connection with Leoni, and somehow or another a strange suspicion was beginning to enter his mind.

He then, having directed Hugh Brandon to see to things during his temporary absence, went below with Jack.

CHAPTER XXX.

A CONFERENCE—A DESPERATE FIGHT.

"Now," said Howard, as he sat down opposite our hero, after locking the cabin door, and placing wine and biscuits before him, which Jack was in no humor to refuse, "now, tell me where are these ladies?"

"On the island of Chios, in the power of Leoni, as I have said," repeated Jack.

"Good. Though all seems so strange and unaccountable," said Howard; "but tell me more. I am at present in the dark completely."

Jack accordingly told all his adventures in Chios, his residence at the house of Demetrius, the treachery of the priest, the marriage, the earthquake, the fight in the chapel, and the subsequent escape of our hero and his friends, leaving the two unfortunate girls behind while they sought aid.

"You deserted them, then," said Howard, with a somewhat contemptuous smile.

"No," cried Jack, flushing; "we did not desert them. Our plan was to cruise about in search of some ship near the coast of the island."

Then Howard said suddenly:

"I have listened quietly to the story of your adventures. Let me inquire how the ladies got there."

Jack was silent a moment.

Howard noticed his confusion, and the red flush of passion mounted to his cheeks.

"Listen to me," he cried, "and then answer me truly, or it will be the worse for you. You know well how those women came upon the island of Chios, and I will prove that you do."

"Prove it, then, Captain Howard," said Jack. "I never deny the truth."

"That is well," replied the pirate, whose anger was rapidly rising, his face still flushing, and his right hand clenching on the handle of his long sword. "Now listen."

"I aided you once to escape from the pirate Leoni."

"When I did so I was not disinterested."

"In the first place, I acted because of a feeling of revenge which I had long had towards Leoni, and in the second place, I fell in love with the elder of the English ladies."

"I looked upon her husband as a rash and foolish man, and I should have landed him when at length I got fairly away from Reggio had not Bernardo precipitated matters."

"He, too, had resolved to possess these prizes of English beauty, and when in the boat, passing from the shore to the *Wolf of the Waves*, as he thought, he stabbed Ernest Harden and flung him over."

"As this was against my plan, I sent Bernardo to the bottom of the sea after him."

"The rest of the Italians joined me as soon as we reached the *Thunder*, my noble vessel which has borne me safely for years over the waters of

the deep blue sea; and so without delay we started for an island not far distant from this latitude.

"There I placed the ladies in security, and went away for a few hours on an expedition against Leoni's treasure cave.

"On the road back I met him, and we fought for the first time at sea.

"Victory declared for me.

"The *Wolf of the Waves* was destroyed, and Leoni, as I believed, went down in her.

"No one, in fact, was saved with the exception of the monk, Alfieri, who asked my protection at the last moment, and obtained it.

"After the explosion, which, as I imagined, sent Leoni and his crew to Davy Jones' locker, we returned to the island, and found everything apparently right.

"The ladies were there safely, and to all appearance the elder one was recovering.

"Then a strange thing happened.

"We had a carouse, and next morning we found the ladies gone, the priest gone, our boat gone, too, and my vessel, the *Thunder*, disappeared also.

"Whoever took those ladies and the priest to Chios took them in the *Thunder*.

"Now, listen, boy. Did Leoni, rising, as it were, from the dead, spring a mine on me, or did you?"

Jack had scarcely expected this.

He had thought that he might have been suspected of aiding Leoni, as he was preparing to aid Howard, but he never dreamed that Ralph the Avenger would fancy it possible that he and his two friends had seized upon the *Thunder* and navigated it to Chios.

He saw that with a man like Howard it was useless to dissemble.

His life might pay the forfeit for his bravery.

But deceit would not save it.

His position was a very serious one.

He was unarmed, and utterly at the mercy of the passionate pirate.

He gave one glance round him to see whether there was any weapon near at hand which he could clutch, and then, seeing none, he rose, folded his arms, and eying Howard boldly, said:

"Captain Ralph Howard, I and my English friends seized the *Thunder*, and brought her to Chios."

The color receded from the pirate's cheeks, leaving it ghastly white.

"You dare to tell me this!" he roared, drawing his sword, and making a step forward towards Jack.

"I told you I should tell you the truth," cried our hero, still standing facing him with folded arms, "but I must say it is neither wise nor courageous to attack a defenseless sailor."

Howard glanced at Jack in mingled rage and surprise.

"By Heaven! Am I being bearded in my own cabin by a boy like you?" he cried. "Mark me, you shall rue the day you dared come on board my vessel to teach me my manners. Boy, I don't know what keeps me from splitting you like a pig."

"Your natural dislike to cowardice, Captain Howard," said Jack boldly. "If I had a weapon in my hand, it would be different, but I cannot see one in the room."

Ralph Howard for a moment seemed to be in doubt whether to laugh or be furious at Jack's effrontery.

But he had more to find out yet.

To punish Jack at once would be to destroy all chances of learning what he desired.

Besides, he had no wish to murder our hero in cold blood.

"What the devil! Do you expect me to hand you a pistol so that you can blow my brains out?" cried he, as he flung himself down once more into his big lounging chair. "Tell me, how did the ladies escape from the island? Be truthful, as you value your life."

"Ah, you fancy we had confederates among your men," said Jack. "You are wrong. Since you know so much, let me tell you the rest. You must judge me as you please."

He sat down again, and in a few brief sentences explained to the pirate all that had occurred.

Ralph listened, but Jack could see that he was beside himself with rage.

"Well, boy," he said, when Jack had finished speaking, "and what treatment—what death do you expect from me?"

"I know not," said Jack, coolly. "Men who follow the peculiar calling that you do, are not apt to be particular."

"What!" shouted Howard in a furious passion, driven to desperation by the cool and calm nature of Jack's responses; "you insult me! Then die, whelp! The fishes round here must be starving, and you will be a windfall for them."

The position of Jack at this moment was most perilous.

Again he glanced around in search of a weapon. But in vain.

He sprang forward, therefore, and seized a wine-glass and the wine-bottle.

Then, as the pirate sprang forward with uplifted weapon, he threw the glass full at his face.

It struck Howard on the temple, staggering him for a moment, and with the bottle brandished over his head, Jack made a spring for the door.

If he could only open this, and rush up to the deck, he would at least have the chance of a weapon and an even fight.

But the chance was not given him.

By a tremendous leap the pirate intercepted him.

"Ha, ha!" he cried, "you would escape me! But no, either you or I do not leave this cabin alive!"

The sudden spring which Ralph Howard had made had certainly prevented Jack from making his escape by the door, but it had also driven him to the other side of the cabin.

Here, to his joy, on a large sea-chest, he saw a sword lying unsheathed.

With a cry of courage Jack sprang towards it.

Ralph noticed both the exclamation and the action.

It was as if our hero had suddenly discovered a friend.

There was not an atom of fear at the prospect of the unequal contest between himself and one so much his superior in strength; at any rate, one who ought to have been his superior.

There was only joy at the chance of entering into a conflict, instead of being blotted out without one blow in his own defense.

In an instant our hero had grasped the weapon, a long and somewhat heavy one, which belonged to Ralph himself, and as the pirate came dashing at him, he crossed swords.

"You young imp of Satan, you shall die!" shouted the pirate, who in his fury had lost all command over himself. "I'll teach you to dare like this a man who has skimmed the Mediterranean as its master and its terror for so many years!"

But Jack seemed in no way dismayed by the attack.

Certainly there seemed little chance of victory, but, at any rate, there might be an opportunity to catch the pirate unawares.

"Pirate!" cried Jack, "I fear you not. We are now on equal terms, and your life I will have if this sword fails me not."

So now the combat was waged in real earnest. Jack warmed to his work.

Clash! clash! went the sound of the swords through the cabin, echoing outside, and drawing the attention of the crew to what was going on.

Presently a loud knocking came at the door.

"Who is there?" roared the pirate, warding off a blow from Jack's sword.

"It is I—Hugh Brandon."

"What do you want? Depart at once, and leave me settle this young tiger."

"We thought something was wrong," replied the other.

"To the devil with your thoughts!" shouted Ralph. "I want no interference. Jack Gale is giving me a lesson in swordsmanship."

During this colloquy both Jack and Ralph Howard had paused, and our hero had a little time to recover his breath.

Then the battle began more fiercely than ever.

The pirate looked the impersonation of rage, with his pale face, down which trickled the blood from the wound inflicted by the glass which Jack had thrown, his eyes glistening with passion, and his white lips showing set and stern even under the heavy mustache.

Again the clashing of steel resounded through the cabin, and presently a stifled cry escaped the lips of Jack Gale as the pirate's steel passed through the fleshy part of his arm.

Jack fell heavily back against the ornamental wall of the cabin, and Ralph made a spring forward to give him the *coup de grace*, shouting:

"Die, boy!"

But in his blind rage—a rage which entirely overcame his better sense, or he would never have indulged in this duel with a brave youth like Jack—the pirate made such an ill-judged and desperate plunge that he over-balanced himself, staggering sideways as he lunged at Jack, and dropped his weapon as our hero's sword flashed through his shoulder to the hilt.

Then he fell with a thud to the cabin-floor. In an instant Jack Gale had taken advantage of his position.

The pirate's sword was raised and flung to the other end of the cabin, and our hero's was pressed against Ralph Howard's throat till the blood came.

At this instant there was again a loud knock-

ing at the door, and a sound as if some one was trying to force his way in.

An expression of rage overspread the pirate's face.

"Jack Gale," he cried, his voice sounding hoarse and strange with pain, and from the peculiar position he was in, "take my pistols; go to the door, and shoot the first man you find there. This was a fair fight between us. I will not move. What advantage you have gained you shall keep. I am no coward."

"Nay," said Jack, as he heard the shuffling sound of steps retreating, "they have gone now. As for myself, it is enough that I have defeated you by an accident, and that your life is at my disposal. What use you will make of any power at your disposal I do not know. The use I make of mine is to say—Here is my hand; let me help you to rise."

The pirate, who was losing blood rapidly, glanced at Jack curiously.

Then, as our hero removed the point of the sword from his throat, he gave him his hand, and with one spring he was on his feet.

All trace of rage had disappeared from his face.

It had resumed, in fact, its usual calm.

"Boy, you are pure English, therefore brave at heart," he cried. "You have conquered. You have made me ashamed of myself. Yet your taunts were enough to irritate me. By Neptune! you are a noble lad, and a bonnie swordsman. What say you—will you join us?"

"Nay, I cannot do that," said Jack, with a smile, as he helped to bind up the pirate's wound, after Howard had seen to his, "I am a sworn officer of His Britannic Majesty's Navy, and as such, I dare not accept your offer. If I wished to do so I should be making myself an outlaw, and should be liable to be hanged at the yard-arm if caught. No—no! The black flag has no charm for me."

The pirate smiled.

"Well, if you remain with me to fight Leoni you will have to do battle under the black flag," he said. "Let us go on deck now. Remember—not a word of what has happened to any one, especially to Norman Rae."

"I will be as silent as the grave," said Jack.

And, with a stern, pre-occupied face, the pirate led the way on deck, followed by our hero, who had kept the long sword, and attached it to his belt.

Strange thoughts occupied his mind as he went up the companion ladder.

What were events leading to?

Had Ralph the Avenger really forgiven him his victory and accepted his generosity? or had he kept in his resentment? and did he still nourish at the bottom of his heart a feeling of deadly revenge which would burst forth and overwhelm its victim at the first favorable opportunity?

This he could not tell.

All he could do was to wait with a bold heart and a strong arm.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN ENEMY IN SIGHT—A USELESS SEARCH.

WHEN the pirate and Jack reached the deck many a glance of strange meaning was cast upon them, and the sight of both of them, wounded and bandaged, did not in any way tend to allay curiosity.

But there was scant time to indulge in anything of this kind.

They were nearing land as Ralph the Avenger made his appearance on deck.

The night was excessively dark, however, and the sea was still rolling inland with frightful velocity.

No boat could have lived in such a sea, and to approach land any nearer would have been to court destruction.

"We must lie by till morning," said Ralph, when he had scanned well the condition of affairs. "It is quite impossible to do anything but watch till dawn. Then we will search the island."

"Cannot we land at some other point?" said Jack, who was all impatience.

"No; with such a sea as we have now, and such a driving wind, we cannot do anything," said Ralph. "It will be impossible indeed to anchor, and we must consequently keep well out at sea, and cruise about."

"It seems dreadful to delay," said Jack, still forgetting, in his eagerness to know the fate of Lydia and Emily, that he would (if successful) be only taking them out of the hands of one pirate and placing them in those of another—although, be it said, not so blood-thirsty.

"It does," replied Ralph, "but there is no help for it. There is but a very short time til-

dawn now, and yet I hope the wind will abate before then."

As they cruised about now they could see by the light of the conflagrations, which were still raging, that great changes had taken place.

A tidal wave of huge dimensions had swept over part of the island.

The promontory, with its whale-like back, was no longer to be seen.

The spot where the house of Demetrius had stood was now one sheet of water—seething, leaping, boiling, surging, dancing, as if in eager delight at the mischief it had done.

Jack and his friends paced to and fro on the deck, striving everywhere to pierce the black veil around them.

They saw nothing, however.

If twenty boats had come out over the rolling waves they would have been unable to detect any sign of them.

But as dawn came on the prophecy of Ralph the Avenger proved true.

Gradually at the approach of light the wind began to subside, and of course the waves began to subside also.

Naturally it took a long time for the ocean to become calm.

However, the big crested billows soon disappeared at the touch of morning's rosy breath, and only the huge long swells remained.

All was impatience now.

Every one on board knew the purpose for which they were hovering round the coast of Chios, and, in anticipation of another brush with the enemy, they sought every point on the horizon eagerly.

But nothing was in sight.

If any vessel was near it must have been hiding behind one of the huge bluffs, in spite of the danger of hugging the rocky shore.

The ship, which Ralph now commanded, and which was a large and somewhat unwieldy one, soon cast anchor, and four boats were sent off full of men armed to the teeth, with Jack, Ben and Tom, and Ralph Howard himself in command.

It was a very perilous landing, but they contrived it in safety, and it was not long before they had pulled their boats up high and dry on the shore.

"Now lead on, Jack Gale, said Ralph, as soon as the boats were secured. "You know the way, and I feel as impatient as yourself. I can scarcely believe in the happiness of again meeting that scoundrel Leoni, after his slipping through my fingers like an eel."

Jack accordingly led the way at once in the direction of the rocks where he had last seen Emily and her sister beneath the sail-tent, and where he and his friends had contrived so singular an escape.

The road was strewn with evidences of the storm and the awful convulsion of nature which had accompanied it.

No trace of Demetrius' house could be seen.

The sea was level now where it had stood.

His home and his family had been swept away at the same time that he had met his fate up at the Greek chapel.

But a still greater and more terrible surprise awaited Jack and his friends when they reached the spot where they had last seen Lydia and Emily.

The rock no longer existed.

Masses of broken stone and dead bodies of men, crushed by the fall of huge masses, lay strewn about.

But, with this exception, the surface of the high cliff was clear, and not a trace of Emily or Lydia was to be seen anywhere.

"We must search everywhere throughout the island," said Ralph Howard.

Then he added, looking scrutinizingly and sternly at Jack:

"I hope, Gale, you have not deceived me."

"I don't understand you," he said. "What object could I have?"

Even if he had not spoken at all his appearance would have been enough to give the lie to such an assertion.

"Well, well, I believe you," said Ralph Howard.

"Let us proceed at once. It will take a long time to pursue our search, and if Leoni is not here, I am all impatience to follow him on the sea."

They at once hurried on in the direction of the Greek chapel.

This they found one mass of ruins, but the dead bodies of Demetrius, Marcos, Fatima, and the Greek priest could easily be distinguished among the fragments of masonry.

These indications that Jack had made no mistake in his story caused the pirate to be all the more eager to pursue the adventure.

Skirting the cliffs where they were able, and going into each hamlet, they continued to seek everywhere.

But in vain.

The scared inhabitants gave them, it is true, but short answers to their questions.

But one thing was evident.

They knew nothing of those whom Jack sought.

As to their next move they were fairly puzzled.

Where could they find Leoni?

To set sail in search of him was but a poor chance, and any attempt at chasing him would be simply absurd with the heavy vessel of which Ralph was now in command.

It was simply a heavy old merchantman, which had anchored off the pirate's isle.

The island had every appearance of being deserted, except by a few shepherds and shepherdesses, and accordingly there seemed no danger in putting some of the crew ashore in search of water.

It proved fatal, however.

No sooner had the two boats been fastened up to the shore than Howard and his men rushed out and seized them.

The pirates accordingly manned the boats, and waiting until the dusk of the evening had become thicker, they rowed out to the ship, and were on deck before suspicion was raised.

The surprise and rage of the captain, who was a Spaniard, was beyond description.

He was offered a surrender if he chose to do so, his men to be placed ashore with their arms.

But the Spaniard would not hear of it.

He would fight to the death!

While the first lot of pirates fought a defensive battle the boats went back for more.

The watering party had been disarmed, and were standing in a helpless crowd, watching the embarkation of the others, and soon the whole of the pirates were on board.

The folly of resistance was now evident to the Spanish crew.

But they nevertheless persevered, until the captain was killed in a mad onslaught on Ralph Howard.

Then the crew laid down their arms, and were sent ashore with their wounded, the dead being flung overboard.

After this the merchant ship was put about, and was met by accident by Jack and his companions in a boat.

Ralph, in spite of the cumbersome nature of the ship, was in no fear of the result of any action into which he might enter with Leoni.

The merchantman carried heavy guns, and his crew was not only much larger, but far better disciplined, and more to be depended upon, than the hurriedly-collected levies of the Italian.

"If I could only find a ship to suit me, I could buy it," said Ralph, "but I have no chance of that. There is, in fact, no time to lose. The only thing to be done is to cruise about under the Spanish flag, and to entice Leoni, if we fall in with him, to an encounter."

Accordingly, the hopeless search being ended, Ralph and his men returned on board the *Madrid*, as the merchantman was called, and once more put to sea.

Meanwhile we must return to Leoni.

When Jack Gale and his comrades effected their daring escape, he at once set it down as certain that they would be engulfed in the raging ocean.

He resolved consequently to wait calmly until morning, and then going on board the *Thunder* (which he was about to rechristen the *Wolf of the Waves*), to sail away to his treasure island.

Of course he knew nothing of the fact that the pirate Ralph had despoiled him of his riches.

At this place he resolved to remain awhile with his "wife," as he called Lydia—before entering into further adventures.

But he was destined to utter disappointment.

Jack had not long left the island when another fearful convulsion of nature shook the island to its very foundation, and threatened to engulf it entirely.

The rock under whose shelter the pirates and their captives were resting, shook and heaved, and large masses of stone began to fall, crushing some of the men, and rendering it unsafe for any one to remain near it.

Leoni at once roused the women, who were crouching in the darkness, half mad with terror and despair, yet feeling almost inclined to welcome death rather than the fate which awaited them.

There was no safety apparently in remaining on the island.

It was safer to be out at sea; safer even to risk the boats out over the rolling billows.

The earth kept heaving, and breaking open in huge fissures, from which issued black smoke and steam, and the two girls clung to each other in terror.

Instead of going down to the perilous shallows near the house of Demetrius, it was arranged to

carry the two boats round to a point under the cliffs, near the caves of Corythæa, where the water was somewhat protected from the inrolling of the waves.

This was accordingly done.

Those on board the captured *Thunder* were signaled to bear up in that direction, and after some perilous work the two ladies were taken on board.

The *Thunder* was concealed during these operations by the huge bluff, which shut out a view of the coast and the offing from any one on board a vessel near the promontory.

Accordingly, although it was early dawn before all the arrangements were made, Leoni's men saw nothing of Ralph Howard.

When at length, however, the *Madrid* set sail, the pirate captain saw it at once.

It was a temptation too great to be resisted.

He could see the Spanish flag flying—the flag suggestive of rich merchandise and doubloons; he noted how she labored along; he could make out but few men aboard, for Ralph the Avenger had observed his enemy too, and kept his men below.

So suddenly Leoni's orders rang out loud and eager.

Up went the black flag, and the *Thunder*, under its new commander, went racing before the wind to meet her desperate and resolute foe, Ralph Howard, the pirate.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER FIGHT AT SEA.

RALPH HOWARD was delighted at the prospect of the success of his plan.

"See; that scoundrel Leoni is falling into the trap," he said, addressing Jack Gale. "I feel my blood surging impatiently through my veins, and I long to press on all sail and meet him halfway. But if I were to it would ruin me."

"How so?" said Jack. "He would not surely run away from you?"

"No, but if he saw such an attempt it would make him suspicious, and he would fight me at long range, instead of coming alongside," said Ralph. "I should have but a poor chance then."

So the *Madrid* went lumbering on, the wind just bellying out her sails, and the *Thunder* bowling after like a race-horse.

Ralph then made a feint of trying to escape.

Every stitch of canvas was spread as soon as the black flag, with its deathly emblem, was run up, and it was surprising to see how swiftly the old merchantman began to fly over the waves.

All was excitement on board.

Jack and his companions were, of course, breathless with impatience.

Hope had again been aroused in their breasts.

As the pirates had been driven out of the island by the storm and the earthquake, there was very little chance that any harm had yet been done to the prisoners.

There was great peril for them, of course, in the sea fight which was threatened.

But they were well aware of Lydia's thoughts and of Emily's, well aware of their bravery.

They had already seen enough bloodshed to render them calm and resolute in such scenes as those which were approaching.

And so, though cannon balls would be flying to and fro, though the deck might be splintered and the vessel doomed, Jack knew he could depend upon the two heroines.

The *Thunder*, of course, had it all its own way in a race.

The *Madrid* forged ahead grandly, considering its heavy build.

But the other fairly skimmed the seas.

To Leoni the feeling was a new-born delight.

He had felt nothing like it since the day when he had lost his vessel—the day when Ralph Howard had blown up the *Wolf of the Waves*, and was supposed to have killed his rival.

He was as excited as if it was his first battle.

Gradually he began to overhaul his unwieldy-looking foe, on the deck of which but few men appeared.

Little did he dream what preparations had been made for his reception—little did he imagine that in every available part of the ship men were waiting in ambush, armed to the teeth.

On he went.

As he came nearer to the *Madrid* he fired a shot, which struck her bulwarks lightly.

But the merchantman went straight on without even firing a shot.

When, however, the *Thunder* was closer up, and another shot was fired, the *Madrid* shortened sail and hauled down its flag.

"Send a boat's crew on board. We surrender all but the ship," shouted a Spanish sailor, one of Ralph's crew, through a speaking trumpet.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Leoni. "Send a boat's crew on board! A very nice trap, indeed! No, no, my friend; we will hook on, and see for ourselves."

The *Thunder* consequently kept on its course.

When, however, it was close to the *Madrid* it sent in a broadside, which went crashing through the timbers of the merchantman as if they had been match wood.

This time Howard was not silent.

There was no fear now lest the pirate Leoni should decline a battle; so, directing his heavy guns so as to rake the deck, he sent in a volley.

This was an astonishment for Leoni.

But still, he was accustomed to all kinds of surprises in the way of warfare; and, nothing daunted, pressed onwards until the two vessels were grappling with each other.

Then, with a loud shout of defiance, Leoni and his boarders leaped upon the deck.

In that moment Lydia and Emily were forgotten.

He was the wild savage—thirsting for blood and treasure.

For an instant he stood triumphant, as it were, on the deck, his enemies retreating before him.

Then, with a loud yell—a discordant cry between a laugh and a shout of defiance—Ralph Howard the pirate sprang up the companion-way—handsome, gigantic—a king among men—waving his long heavy sword above his head as easily as if it had been a wand.

Leoni uttered no exclamation when he saw his rival.

He stood for a moment as if rooted to the spot with surprise.

Then, as Ralph leaped in front of him, he crossed swords, and the fight between the two pirates began.

The plan of the battle had all been arranged carefully beforehand.

Ralph Howard was to lead the attack upon Leoni and his immediate followers.

Jack, Ben and Tom were to be at the head of those who were to swarm upon the deck of the *Thunder* and rescue Lydia and Emily from the cabin.

The pirate crew had at first demurred at this plan.

They desired to be led by their own lieutenants.

Hugh Brandon, as the one who had fought, defeated and killed Giulio, was, they argued, the proper one to lead them.

But this was easily explained away.

It was told them how their appearance would frighten the ladies, whom it was their wish to save, but who would come joyfully if they recognized the faces of their English friends.

So they put aside all differences at the bidding of their captain, and followed Jack and his companions with a desperate willingness worthy of a better cause.

The scene became now a furious and terrible one.

THE new crew of the *Thunder* had of course imagined, in common with Leoni, that the vessel they were about to attack was a merchantman, manned by ordinary seamen; and when they discovered their mistake they were as much taken aback as the Italian pirate himself.

They saw at once that the only thing to be done was to make a good defense, and get off in the *Thunder* as quickly as possible.

But this was sooner said than done.

Ralph Howard was rapidly driving Leoni and his men towards the stern of the merchantman, where they would either have to surrender, if not victorious, or be driven overboard into the sea.

On the other hand, Jack and his companions were making terrible havoc with their foes on the deck of the *Thunder*.

Their aim was, of course, to make their way to the cabin where the ladies were, and bring them to a place of safety.

At any rate, it was necessary for them to be on deck until the issue of the combat was no longer doubtful.

In case of certain victory Ralph would naturally resume command of his own ship, and consequently, in any case it was safe to bring them on board the *Madrid*.

It was not long before Jack with Ben and Tom had fought their way to the cabin-door.

"Open quickly," cried our hero, in a voice hoarse with smoke and shouting.

No answer came.

"Open, I say, or all is lost," he cried again.

"Go away," cried the voice of Lydia, strained, and sorrow-stricken. "Surely at a moment like this you can leave us alone—to our prayers."

"It is I—Jack!" shouted our hero impatiently; "do not delay. Each moment you do so may be the cause of a brave man's death."

They knew him now, and in an instant the cabin door was opened.

Jack's first impulse, of course, was to clasp Emily to his breast.

But he would not even waste a moment.

"Follow me," he cried. "You must be prepared to see a horrid scene of carnage, and you must bear in mind that Ralph Howard—your late captor—is for the moment our friend. So be guided by him. He is even now fighting desperately for us. Quick—come!"

He led the way on deck, and the two released captives at once hurried up, followed by a pleasant-looking Chiote girl, whom Leoni had pressed into the service to wait on his prisoners.

It was rapidly growing dusk now.

But still the battle raged furiously.

Leoni's crew, being so outnumbered, were doing their utmost to recover a footing on their own deck, their object being to cast off the grappling irons, move off quickly, and fight from a distance.

Ralph saw the move.

He had naturally guessed it.

But his impetuosity spoiled everything.

He had lost Leoni in the *melee*, as he had done on a previous occasion, and he was full of fury as he saw him leap over on to the deck of the *Thunder*, and call his men to follow him.

Without thinking of consequences, he leaped also, and in an instant after he felt the vessels part.

The grappling irons had been cast off, and he and Jack and his friends, with Lydia and Emily, were on the deck of the enemy, with only a handful of men.

Ralph saw the error he had committed.

But he was in no way daunted.

"Follow me," he cried to Jack, "and do as I do. I will take Lydia Harden. She is the heaviest, and I am stronger than you. You take Emily, and we will leap with them into the sea. It is our only chance."

"I will save Emily or die," Jack replied calmly.

And he passed the word on to the men.

It was now rapidly becoming dark.

Objects already were dusky and indistinct.

But, nevertheless, they fought desperately, resolutely, and carefully, too, as they went backwards—the three women behind them—towards the stern of the *Thunder*.

It was a difficult thing for Leoni's men to use firearms now.

Everything was so indistinct and vague in the rapidly thickening night that their shots might have reached the two beautiful girls.

So the battle was carried on with swords and knives, and a deadly battle it was, occasionally a pistol being used where it was quite safe to do so.

The men of the *Madrid* understood exactly what role they had to play.

So, when presently they heard a cry of "Overboard!" they knew what to do, and did it.

Jack seized Emily in his arms.

As he did so Leoni confronted him, and their swords clashed around the girl's head.

But in a rush Leoni was borne backwards, and Jack, crying, "Trust to me, dear Emily!" leaped into the waves.

As he did so, Ralph the Avenger, with his burden, came into the water close beside him.

A terrible outcry—a roar of tumultuous voices—followed this unexpected adventure of daring, a roar amid which sounded clearly, with awful distinctness, indeed, one shrill, prolonged shriek of agony.

Neither of the women spoke or moved when they reached the sea.

The fall seemed to have taken from them the power of speech.

Jack and Howard murmured encouraging words to them.

But in vain.

They received no response.

Evidently the girls had fainted.

Both our hero and Ralph struck out bravely. The ship was not far distant, and of course there would be no shots fired after them by Leoni's men.

They could hear, however, sounds as if boats were being lowered, and the crack of a pistol or a musket now and then, proved that shots were being fired into the crowd of sailors who had jumped over after Jack and Ralph.

A groan or a shrill cry now and then also told that they had taken effect.

But Jack and Howard kept still onward.

In such a retreat as this, to look back or hesitate was to be lost.

The distance between the vessels was indeed very small, and it was not long before they reached the side of the *Madrid*.

"*Madrid* ahoy!" shouted Howard breathlessly.

"Where away?"

"Here, clinging to the chains under the port-

bow," cried Howard. "Come down, Brandon—one or two of ye, and help us."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Hugh Brandon, whose voice Howard had recognized so readily even among the whistling of the wind and the hundred and one noises round him.

And in a few moments willing hands were ready to grasp them, and aid them on deck.

First the forms of the invisible women were borne up on deck, then Jack and Howard followed.

"Give them a broadside, Brandon!" cried the pirate, in a hoarse voice, "then tack and give them another. Though it is the *Thunder*, spare her not. If I cannot have her, she shall not be Leoni's."

But at this moment, just as Brandon went to give his orders, there was a loud cry of horror and dismay close by Howard's side.

It came from Jack Gale, who was kneeling by the side of the women they had rescued, while one of the crew held a lantern close to the pale inanimate faces.

"Hold, Captain Ralph!" shouted Jack. "Fire not a shot! Oh, Heavens! see what has happened! You have saved the wrong woman! This is not Lydia Harden; it is the Greek maiden!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DESPERATE RESOLVE—A CHASE UNDER DIFFICULTIES—ON THE TRACK ONCE MORE.

FOR an instant Howard paused, silent as a man whose speech was suddenly taken from him.

Then he said, hoarsely:

"Satan himself helps that scoundrel. But take these women to the cabin, or they will die. Set some of them to work to rummage among the merchandize. They will be sure to find some clothes. Give them some brandy and rouse them up, and they can take off their drenched things. Meanwhile, I will see to Leoni."

"Captain Ralph," exclaimed Jack, as he raised the form of Emily once more in his arms, "you are not surely going to fire again when we know that Lydia Harden is on board?"

"Be not alarmed," said Howard; "we will fire at the rigging and disable her, so that we can catch her up, and have the fight over again. Pray delay no longer."

Now that he had seen that Lydia Harden was indeed left behind, Howard was anxious to dismiss Jack Gale to the cabin, so that he could once more put forth his energy in pursuit of the pirate who had so often outwitted him.

Jack made no further delay.

To do so would have been to injure Emily—to the run risk of her never recovering from her swoon.

So he bore her gently down into the cabin, Tom Meadows holding the lantern, and Ben Brace bearing the form of the Greek maiden.

The lamps in the cabin were soon lit, hot water was procured, hot spirits were administered, the feet of the two girls were immersed in a warm bath, and presently they began to show signs of revival.

The Grecian girl was the first to open her eyes and looked around her; then, as if dazed at what she saw—the bright lights, the strange faces of the men who were tending her—she closed them again.

Then a shudder passed through the form of Emily, and her eyelids unfolding, gave her a view of the face of Jack Gale.

This seemed to reassure her, though the rosy blushes came to her cheeks when she saw how she and her companion had been tended by her lover and his rough friends.

But what roused her most, what set her heart beating with wild sorrow and dread, was the sight of the Greek maiden by her side.

Her presence told plainly that Lydia had not been saved.

She took Jack feebly by the hand.

"Dear Jack," she said, "ever at my side to save me. But where is Lydia?"

"Can you bear yet to hear evil news?" said Jack, tenderly. "Yes, I may as well tell you. She is not with us. Captain Howard made a mistake in the darkness, and brought the Greek girl here on board instead of your sister. But we are again pursuing Leoni, and all will be set right soon."

He did not tell her that "pursuing" the *Thunder* in the *Madrid* was like a whale-boat racing a revenue cutter!

"But now, Emily," he said, without waiting for her answer, "pray try and get off your wet things. In yonder bundle are clothes for you and this girl. Be dressing yourselves while I and my friends run up to aid the captain."

And leaving her hastily, he led the way out of the cabin and hurried on deck.

He found Captain Howard in a most agitated frame of mind.

In fact, it was no wonder it should be so.

He had hoped that he was near the summit of his ambition.

Of course, it was not possible for a man like Ralph the Avenger to realize the fact that from the very nature of his calling he could be loathsome in the eyes of a woman like Lydia Harden.

He had treated her with respect during the time she had been his prisoner; he had proposed for her sake to give up his adventurous life, and settle down as a private gentleman among those who would know nothing of his antecedents; he had risked his own life to save her now.

What other proofs did she require of his disinterested love?

And now, just as there seemed a chance of proving it to her, he had by a fatal mistake again lost his opportunity.

Well now did he understand the meaning of that awful scream which had echoed over the waves when he had leaped from the deck of the *Thunder*.

But what could he do to remedy the evil?

He knew well that Leoni, having his prize on board, would be in no hurry to engage in another engagement.

The Italian pirate, in fact, had got rid of a burden in the person of Emily.

Without her Lydia was more absolutely in his power than ever.

The ceremony, which had been only partially performed at the Greek chapel, could now be completed at another place, where, without her sister's interference, and under the influence of some potent drug, she would be a passive victim.

Then Leoni could consummate his crowning act of villainy.

He knew that Lydia as his wife could not live long.

Even if she did not take her life, she would pine away with sorrow.

He had—in spite of his vanity—brought himself to thoroughly believe this.

Accordingly he proposed—the instant that the marriage had been performed—to enter into negotiations with an English lawyer to obtain possession of some, if not all the fortune belonging to Lydia.

He had ascertained in one way and another that Lydia was possessed not only of money in her own right, but also settled on her by her husband.

All this he intended at any rate to try and get, and then she—might go to heaven when she pleased.

All his love was gone now.

Her coldness—her evident disgust—had caused that to disappear long ago.

He only desired now to marry her for revenge, and to seize upon her fortune.

Accordingly, when he found the mistake which Howard had made, when he discovered that Emily had gone, he knew that his best game would be to show his enemy "a clean pair of heels."

He was well aware that he was overmatched by Howard's crew.

Had he now been commander of the men who had gone to their last account in the explosion of the *Wolf of the Waves*, he would have had no hesitation in returning to the attack.

His purpose of fighting the *Madrid* at a distance, moreover, was frustrated.

When the final scene of the battle was over, when Ralph Howard and Jack Gale had leaped over into the waves with their respective burdens, Lydia had given that one long agonized cry which had so resounded over the bosom of the ocean; and then, when all was over, when she knew that she had no further hope, she had flung herself at the feet of Leoni.

She had heard his orders to the gunners, and had understood their meaning.

"Oh, spare my sister," she cried, with hands uplifted, and wild eyes gazing—wild and awful—from her pale face, in the dull glow of the ship's lanterns; "every shot you fire into yonder ship endangers her and the one dear to her."

Leoni laughed scornfully.

"What!" he cried; "have you so much regard for the sister and her lover who betrayed you and left you in my power; who sought their own safety and thought of nothing beyond?"

Lydia rose to her feet at this.

"My sister never abandoned me," she cried. "It was Ralph Howard who leaped into the sea with the Grecian maiden. It was a mistake. All I ask is safety for my sister and her friends."

Leoni gave a rapid order.

"See!" he cried, taking her cold, unresisting hand, "I have already obeyed you. Come into the cabin; this place among the dead and dying is not one for you."

He led her gently along the slippery deck, which was being rapidly cleared of its ghastly

burdens, and in a few moments she was resting on one of the luxurious couches in the cabin of the *Thunder*.

She had scarcely taken her position here when a loud crash was heard on the deck above.

She could see the hands of Leoni clenching now vengefully, and his black eyes sparkle.

"What is that?" she cried.

"Ralph Howard has fired into us!" exclaimed Leoni; "he wishes to renew the combat."

The light of hope for an instant illumined the face of Lydia.

"Then they have not deserted me," she cried, unguardedly, clasping her white hands in an ecstasy of joy.

This speech made the pirate beside himself with passion.

He seized her fiercely by the wrist.

"Woman!" he cried, "do you know what your words imply? Do you know that you are wishing my death? And yet you ask me to spare that ship and your friends?"

"Oh, forgive me!" cried Lydia. "I am distracted by the awful scenes I have gone through."

He laughed scornfully.

"That is the usual excuse of a woman," he said; "but I warn you of this. Within the next five minutes you must decide whether your friends live or die."

"I must decide?"

"Yes," replied the pirate, angrily, "it is entirely in your hands. Listen. My ship can outstrip that lumbering tub of Howard's as the wind can outstrip a log floating on the ocean. I can keep beyond the range of his guns, or I can so handle my ship as to make it well-nigh impossible for him to harm me. But I have guns of long range, and ere noon to-morrow his vessel and all in it will have gone to the bottom of the sea, unless you make one promise."

Lydia made no reply.

She bent down and hid her face in her hands.

Leoni, seeing that his words were taking effect, proceeded:

"The promise I require is that you will be my wife. Nay, do not start. Do not reply until you have thoroughly heard me out. I am in no hurry. Any time within six months will suit me; but what I want is your sacred promise that within six months you will become my wife."

"If you refuse, why, then I promise you I will blow yonder ship and every one in it into the sea. If you consent, why, I will clap on all sail, and away we will go from that pirate ship."

Boom!

"Death!" he added, as another crash was heard overhead; "do you think I can remain here quietly and see my ship blown to pieces? Speak quickly, or, by Heaven, it is too late!"

Lydia looked at him with agonized eyes.

She saw that a crisis had come.

She could not expect this man to be quiet long, as things were going.

And yet what could she answer?

To refuse would mean the certain destruction of Emily, Jack, and their friends.

To consent was desecration to Ernest's memory; dishonor to him, if he were living.

"Quick, girl, your answer!" cried Leoni, sternly.

He advanced to the door, and opening it slightly, called out:

"Guiseppe!"

"Ay, ay, captain!"

"Load the carronade; aim at the top-hamper of the brig," said the pirate; "but await my order before firing."

"Oh, Leoni, have you no mercy?" murmured Lydia.

"No—only love and revenge."

The words burned his throat as he uttered them.

He hated her and longed for vengeance.

"Answer me now, or it is too late. I cannot remain here to bear the destruction of my ship. Speak now, or hold your peace forever."

"I know not that my husband is dead," moaned the wretched woman.

"Alive or dead, I swear your husband shall never see you more! Guiseppe!" roared Leoni up the companion-ladder, "knock away her top-hamper. Sink her to the bottom of the sea!"

The answer was a roar, and a tremulous motion ran through the ship.

The order had been executed with the rapidity of a flash of lightning.

"Your husband is dead!" cried Leoni, answering her words scornfully, but not truthfully. "I know well what fate he met with at the hands of Bernardo. I know that his dead body was washed ashore at Reggio. Do you desire more proof?"

"No—no! This is indeed horrible!"

"Then decide, for I will wait no longer."

One moment more.

Then in a low, feeble voice, she said—

"Leoni, I must yield. In six months I will be your wife; but spare my sister. Follow Ralph Howard, and when there is a chance, without risking her life, take her from him, give her back to me."

A grim smile overspread the face of Leoni.

He crossed over to her, and pressed a kiss upon her shuddering lips.

"It is well," he said; "you have chosen well. You have need of rest, and I know a spot where I can place you out of the way of all troubles and annoyances."

"A lovely spot it is, on the borders of the Mediterranean. The blue sea at your feet, the blue sky above, calm, peace, joy everywhere. There you will regain strength and health. And I? I will leave you there in safety while I seek your sister and your friends. I have your word, the word of an English lady, and if I returned home and found you had deceived me I should destroy them all. I would wait for no pleadings. I would kill them!"

And as he spoke she felt the hand in which he held hers tremble.

"I will not deceive you," she said softly.

"It will be better not; if you do, my revenge shall be deep," he cried.

And with these words he hastened across the cabin floor and passed up on deck.

The *Thunder* was going along quickly over the dark sea.

Scarcely an object could be seen in the gloom.

At some considerable distance could be distinguished the lights of the *Madrid*, which seemed to be laboring heavily, but these seemed to be dying away in the darkness.

And they soon died away more swiftly.

By Leoni's orders every stitch of canvas was spread, and under the influence of a crisp and steady wind the *Thunder* began to dash along like a racehorse.

Farther and farther behind seemed the lanterns of the old merchantman, now Ralph's pirate ship.

More short fell the shots from her persistent guns.

Howard soon found it was of no avail.

"For some reason," he said to Jack Gale, "that villain is resolved not to fight. We are doomed, I fear, to disappointment."

"What are you going to do, then?" asked Jack impatiently.

"I cannot tell exactly, except this, that I must make with all haste to the shores of Italy," replied Howard. "He is certain to go there to procure some better men than the milksops who fought but now. I, too, must go there to get a ship. To sail in this is like walking with a heavy weight tied to your ankles."

"Then you abandon the chase?" said Jack.

"No, I do not," said Howard, with a grim smile, "the chase abandons me. I could not move an inch quicker if I were suddenly offered a million of money. See, every stitch of canvas has been set, the wind blows merrily, yet there goes our enemy like a fairy bark."

"It is awful to think of, Lydia," said Jack. "I know not what to tell Emily."

"Doubtless," returned Howard; "but tell her I know all Leoni's haunts, and that I will never cease till I have released her beautiful sister. But I must make the best of my way to the coast of Italy now and get a ship."

As he spoke, a shot, the one fired by Guiseppe, came whistling through the rigging, doing very little damage, but coming perilously near Howard's head.

The pirate laughed.

"That is Leoni's way of saying 'good-bye,'" he cried. "Let us not be behindhand in politeness. Jack, give him one. Fire high to disable him. If you do, we will fight him again."

But it was in vain.

Jack was a good marksman, as we know.

But the distance was too great.

The shot fell short.

Again and again they fired.

But to no purpose.

The lights of the *Thunder* faded away in the distance, and the *Madrid* labored heavily on without a chance of her prey.

Hope died away in Jack's breast, though he tried all he could to inspire confidence in the breast of Emily.

Her woman's heart had greater fears than his.

"Ah, Jack," she cried, "comfort me as you will, I shall never see Lydia again. I shall have no one to comfort me."

"No one," said Jack, reproachfully, as he kissed her and pressed her to his breast, regardless of the presence of the Greek maiden.

"Ah, yes, Jack," she cried, coiling her soft arms around his neck, "I know that you love me; but you do not know what the affection is between me and Lydia."

And she wept gently on his breast.

Little did she dream that at that very moment Lydia was the promised wife of Leoni the pirate.

Spezzia is a beautiful place.

It is situated on the very edge of the Mediterranean, whose waves almost lave the walls of the little white houses.

Up above the little town frowned the Castle of San Angelo—a gray and grim sentinel over its humble neighbors.

Behind this was a densely-timbered wood, at the furthest verge of which was a monastery.

Half way up the hill leading to the castle was a white stone house.

A house not unlike that of Demetrius on the Island of Chios.

Here, not long after the battle between the *Thunder* and the *Wolf of the Waves*, there arrived five people.

An Italian, a lady in the same style, a black in a fantastic garb, a negress and a young Italian lady.

The Italian had bought this house with its contents.

Need we say that the two first-named were Leoni and Lydia?

The others were a negro and his wife—Miguel and Ada—whom he had engaged as spies on the actions of his prisoner betrothed.

The fifth was Angelica, a maid to attend on Lydia.

Everything had been placed in this house to render it comfortable and luxurious.

There was indeed nothing left to desire.

Only one thing.

Freedom for the poor English girl!

"You cannot better this in England," Leoni said. "What can you ask for more?"

She pointed to the crape she wore.

"A life that is lost to me," she answered. "A love that is dead—my English husband; freedom and happiness."

He scowled darkly and turned away.

That evening he left her.

As he went he renewed his warning.

"Remember," he said, "if you break your word, death shall overtake your friends. I am even now on their track."

"And you have promised to bring my sister and my friends to me?"

"Yes," he said; "and I will perform. See that you do the same. In four weeks expect me!"

Four weeks.

What joy!

What might not happen in an absence of so long a time?

He might even meet the fate he so richly deserved.

At any rate, she paid no heed to a promise given under compulsion, and though outwardly calm and satisfied, she looked out for every chance of escape.

One evening, about a week after Leoni's departure, she was walking in the high-walled garden, when a voice from the other side hailed her, and a note fastened to a stone fell at her feet.

She knew it must be from a friend, and she sprang forward and seized it eagerly.

Lydia started in wonder as she saw the letter flutter to the ground.

Whence could it have come?

She did not, of course, deem it possible that Jack Gale and the pirate Howard could have discovered her whereabouts.

And so, until presently she was enabled to retire into a private nook to read it, she was in an agony of suspense.

She was, of course, entirely ignorant of the handwriting of Jack or any of his friends, and consequently was not prepared for the great surprise which awaited her.

It was from Jack Gale.

It was very brief, but to the purpose.

"We have discovered, in the most miraculous manner, the fact that you are here in this house, and that you are in the power of Leoni. We shall be here again in three days to save you. If you are ready to fly on the third night from this, you can expect us at eight o'clock. We will come in sufficient force to carry you off in spite of Leoni or his pirate crew. If you are well enough in health to look forward to such an escape, throw a reply to this over the wall at the other end of the garden, just where you found this. If you are not strong enough for such an adventure, we can defer it for a week or more. Emily sends her best love, and hopes to meet you soon in safety. Your affectionate friend,

"JACK GALE."

With an impulsiveness which she could not repress, Lydia pressed the letter to her lips.

"Dear Jack," she murmured, "he is indeed a brave youth. He will be eager to hear my answer

for Emily's sake; but how can I contrive it? I have no writing materials."

She knew, however, in a case like this, impatience was of no avail, and consequently she resolved to re-enter the house, as if tired of her sojourn in the open air, and ask for pen, ink, and paper with which to amuse herself.

She found this no difficulty.

There seemed not the remotest chance of her being able to communicate with any one of the outer world, and consequently when she asked for writing materials they were given her without the least hesitation.

She made no special haste in the matter.

She wrote down some things from memory, which she scattered about the table, and then set down on paper merely these words:

"Love to my sister. Grateful thanks to all my friends. On the third night at eight o'clock I shall expect you."

She signed no name.

It was better not to do so.

If the letter was found by Leoni, there was no absolute trace that it had any relation to her and her friends, and as regarded Jack it was in no way requisite to sign it.

The words, simple as they were, spoke for themselves.

She made no unnecessary hurry in sending the note to its destination.

After her evening meal she went for a stroll in the high-walled garden, and biding her time fastened a stone in the letter, and threw it over, as nearly as possible in the spot where her missive had been cast over to her.

She received no reply.

No sign was given that her friends had received the intimation.

But she was quite confident that she would not be neglected.

Quite certain that at the appointed time her friends would be ready to rescue her.

The time passed all too slowly.

But, even on leaden wings, time must fly, and so at length the third day came, and eagerly Lydia waited for any sign of her friends.

Evening at length approached.

Dusk began to fall over the landscape about six o'clock, and her heart beat wildly with expectation.

Leoni had not yet returned.

Everything seemed to favor the hope that she would be able to make her escape.

Seven o'clock at last!

From afar along the hard road, as she leaned out of the window, she heard the sound of rushing wheels.

They were coming!

She hastily attired herself in her traveling-cloak and bonnet, and waited eagerly.

The sound of the wheels came nearer and nearer.

Lydia's bosom heaved with eager emotion as it was pressed against the chill stone of the window-sill.

She did not think of Ralph Howard.

It never suggested itself to her that she was only exchanging the tyranny of one desperate pirate for another.

All that occurred to her mind was that she would meet Jack and Emily.

No matter whether Ralph Howard was there or not, she would at any rate be with friends.

The sounds came nearer.

The carriage, of whatever kind it was, drew up at the front gate of the house.

Then there came hurried steps up the front garden.

What could this mean?

Had they contrived so easily to elude Leoni's servants?

Or had the front gate been left unbolted?

The strange event was not long in being explained.

She heard below a well-known voice.

Leoni's!

She was deceived.

A hurried footstep came up the stairs, and she as swiftly as possible threw off her traveling attire.

It would not do to give Leoni the suspicion that she was about to make her escape.

Her only chance of safety from him was her promise to marry him.

He must not yet know that she had deceived him.

A knock came at her door.

"Signora Harden," said a voice, "can I speak to you?"

It was the voice of the maid, Angelica.

"Yes; enter," said Lydia.

The girl, a dark-haired, swarthy Italian, immediately obeyed the summons.

"The Signor Leoni desires to see you, signora," said she. "Can you see him, now?"

"Yes, certainly; if he wishes it. But I am very tired."

"It is something of importance he wishes to say to you, I know," said the maid. "He has been through some perilous adventure, I fancy, from his haggard looks and distracted manner."

Lydia's heart sank at these words.

What if Leoni had met Jack Gale and his friends, and had attacked them?

What if in fact the whole plan of escape had failed?

She was soon told all.

Passing down to the room below, she found Leoni, flushed, excited, and with his right arm bound up.

He had evidently been in some fight.

"I regret to say, signora," he said, "that you must prepare to leave this place at once."

"At once!"

Lydia's face expressed surprise.

But not the inward horror of her mind.

"Yes. I am sorry I was not able to give you longer notice," said Leoni; "but something has occurred to render it imperative for me to go up the mountains, therefore I must ask you to accompany me at once. I have a vehicle which will carry us thither without trouble."

"But I do not feel well enough for a journey of any kind," said Lydia, stammeringly. "Cannot you give me until the morning?"

"No, that is impossible," said Leoni, all his usual furious passion bursting forth. "This journey of mine is necessary. We must start in a quarter of an hour."

Lydia glanced at the handsome time-piece on the mantel-shelf, a spoil from some merchant vessel, and saw that it was now half-past seven.

A quarter of an hour.

If she could delay half an hour.

Leoni saw her anxious look, and at once suspected something.

"You must be ready in a few minutes," he said, "my business will admit of no delay."

His fierce eyes and eager glance showed that there was no chance of changing his feelings.

She must trust to the chapter of accidents.

"Very well," she said; "I will do my best to get ready quickly."

And without another word she quitted the room, and went up to her own chamber.

Here she delayed as much as possible.

But it was all in vain.

In a few moments Angelica once more made her appearance.

"Leoni is awaiting you, signora," she said, "and he says that if you do not descend at once, he will come and fetch you."

There seemed no help for it.

There appeared no sign of any one approaching.

She threw up the window and listened.

All was silent, save for the murmuring of voices below.

A sudden idea seized her.

What if she were to let herself down from the window, and scale the garden wall?

She knew the danger attending this.

But before there had been no such desperate necessity for risk.

Now, her heart was in a whirl of dread.

The idea of passing up into the mountains again with Leoni was terrible.

She had already seen enough of the terrors of the brigand villages.

She turned suddenly to Angelica.

"Angelica," she cried, "aid me to escape. It can be of no advantage to you to keep me in this place."

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah, signora," she said, "it may be no advantage to me, but I cannot aid you."

"Why?"

"You are a stranger, and I should be killed if I help you to escape," said the girl. "Ha! there is Leoni calling me. Come, signora, to talk of escape is useless."

It was.

At the very moment there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and the pirate cried in a tone of anger:

"Signora, I am waiting for you. Quick!"

There was no use attempting further resistance.

With an aching heart she descended the stairs.

Her only hope now was that Jack Gale and his friends, finding that she had departed, would follow on her track.

She did not pause to think how they could possibly trace her.

They had already done so in a manner that was quite miraculous, and why should they not do so again?

The only difficulty was that Leoni was going by the front way, and that she expected her friends to arrive by the rear.

Leoni was below when she descended, pacing impatiently to and fro.

He was armed to the teeth.

Evidently he expected something more exciting than a mere ride up the mountain path.

"This way, signora," cried the pirate. "You have kept me a long time. I fear there will be loss of life through the delay."

"I cannot see why you should have waited for me," said Lydia, as they passed along the front garden path. "I was well enough where I was."

"No doubt, but too far from me," said Leoni. "I am just now in no pleasant position. I have offended the authorities, and have a price put upon my head. I am going up to the mountains to claim protection from Rinaldo, the brigand chief, such as I have afforded him before now. You will be safe there from all intrusion, for you are my affianced wife."

If it had not been dark, Leoni would have seen, and noted with an angry heart, the shudder which passed through the frame of Lydia Harden at these words.

But he did not see it.

His mind was too preoccupied with the danger around him.

In fact, he was evidently in danger of his life.

The front gate was soon reached.

Here, an old tumble-down looking vehicle, on the hackney coach principle, was drawn up.

On the box was a driver, and a man was beside him heavily armed.

Round the carriage was a body of twelve armed men on horseback.

In a few moments Lydia was within it, and with Leoni at her side, was being dragged up the rugged mountain path, as quickly as three mules could draw it.

It was a warm night, and the carriage windows were open, and Lydia strained her ears to catch any sound that might come from lower down the mountain path.

But in vain.

Even if there had been any signs of pursuers they could not have been heard above the shouts of the mule-drivers, and the cracking of their whips, and the trampling and buzz of conversation of the mounted escort.

So on they went, apparently without any chance of hindrance, again toward Spezzia.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON THE ROAD—A DESPERATE CONFLICT—LEONI'S VICTORY.

LEONI, in spite of the fact that a price was put upon his head, was by no means displeased at the change of affairs.

Lydia was wholly in his power.

He was not hampered by her sister, or by other friends, and whom nevertheless he did not like to destroy, because of irrevocably strengthening the hatred of Lydia for him.

He did not place much faith in her betrothal to him.

He knew in fact that her promise had been wrung from her by force.

But still there was in his mind a wonderful belief in the power of a promise made by an English lady; and he at times considered that he was perfectly safe with her if only she could be kept from any interview with her friends.

It was far better for his plans, moreover, to have her up among the mountain brigands than on board ship.

All there was hurry-scurry, commotion of one kind or another.

On land, there would be quietness at any rate; he would have abundant chances of being alone with her; and there also he would have to plan the scheme which he proposed to carry out in regard to Lydia's property.

The brigands up in the mountain village, moreover, were all prepared for his coming.

Days before, Rudolpho, the lieutenant of Rinaldo, the chief of the brigands, had received a letter from the latter, stating that he was compelled to be absent from home for a time; that, in fact, it was not safe for him to come into the neighborhood of Spezzia at present, and that during his absence, Leoni, if he showed himself, was to be treated as chief of the band.

Thus Leoni, when he reached the brigand village, was certain of a welcome, and not only that, would have power to do as he pleased.

Hark!

What was that sound?

Deeply thinking upon his plans, he had not observed it before, but it seemed distinctly like the breaking of iron.

He had no sooner observed it, when the old carriage gave a sudden lurch.

Then it swayed to and fro without advancing, and the horses were pulled up.

Leoni sprang up with an oath, and opening the door, leaped out.

He saw at once what was the matter.

The carriage had broken down.

Up there on the dark hills, it lay half on its side, with one of the wheels wrenched off.

Fiercely upbraiding the driver, Leoni assisted Lydia to alight.

What was to be done now?

It was a long way to Spezzia, a dark night, and not a light to be hoped for on the way.

To go back was impossible for him.

It would be throwing himself into the arms of death.

Just as he was for the moment lost in cogitation, though apparently listening to the mingled imprecations and apologies of the driver of the vehicle, he saw far below on the path beneath him a number of bright lights, which flickered to and fro across one spot for the moment, and then disappeared, with the exception of one, which kept steadily advancing upwards.

What could those lights be?

Certainly they could be nothing agreeable to Leoni, and he said at once:

"We must advance without the carriage. It is perilous to remain here."

He would have thought it more so had he known all.

Strange to say, he had no suspicion whatever of the presence of Ralph Howard, or of Jack Gale, on the shores of Italy; still less did he imagine that they were absolutely cognizant of his actions, and already on his track.

It would have made him even more satisfied as to his own unpleasant position had he been aware that Howard and his friends had gone to the rendezvous on horseback, that they had found their way into the house, that they had compelled Angelica to tell the truth, and that they were even now in pursuit of him by a nearer route than that taken by the cumbersome carriage of Leoni.

With Howard was a force consisting of Jack Gale, Ben Brace, Tom Meadows, and six of the best men on board the *Madrid*.

Hugh Brandon was not among them.

He had—in accordance with the resolution of Ralph the Avenger—taken his way towards England on board of a man-of-war bound for home, representing himself as an escaped prisoner.

Still, without him, the little force was strong enough; at any rate for an encounter with Leoni's men on that narrow mountain path.

However, Leoni, though puzzled to think what could be the meaning of the lights so mysteriously moving about, took no further notice of them, but giving the necessary directions to those with him, placed Lydia on one of the mules, and mounting a horse by her side, began slowly the ascent of the mountain.

For some little time all went well with the pirate gang, but just as they came upon a more level part of the road—a gentle ascent not far from the spot where once before Jack Gale and his friends had had a tussle with the brigands—they suddenly saw before them a number of dark forms drawn across their passage.

"Halt!" cried Leoni. "Who goes there?"

The pirates drew up at once.

One of the dark forms seen so indistinctly in the blackness of the night, advanced to meet the pirates.

"Is Leoni, captain of the *Thunder*, here?" he asked.

"Captain of what was the *Thunder*," returned Leoni himself; "but being captured by me, is re-christened *Wolf of the Waves*. What want you with me?"

These insolent words were caused by the fact that the pirate imagined the speaker to be one of a government force sent to trap him.

"You have with you an English lady who is traveling with you against her will," replied the man. "We are here to claim her."

"She is not here against her will," replied Leoni, "nor have I yet understood that you have any right to ask. The only lady who is with me and my friends is my affianced wife, betrothed by her own promise. You have made a mistake, so let us pass if you value your lives."

By this time Howard and his men had dismounted, and had crept close.

Their horses were placed on either side so as to form a kind of barrier in case of defeat or temporary confusion.

"Leoni!" cried the voice of Ralph the Avenger, ringing out clearly and loudly in the night air, "you lie, as you always do! Lydia Harden never consented to be your wife save to rescue her sister or to spare herself for a while. I am Ralph Howard, here to take her from you, to stop the current of your life, to take revenge for the past. Draw, rascal, and defend yourself!"

This apparently long speech was roared out in an impetuous burst, which lasted but a moment, and then their weapons crossed.

It was strange that it never occurred to these men to shoot each other down like dogs in the dark.

To Howard it would have been beneath the character he had always shown, pirate and desperate outlaw as he was.

To Leoni it would have been only in accordance with his usual conduct.

He simply omitted to think of it at the moment, or desired not to depreciate himself in the eyes of Lydia.

No one else in his band was likely to be so squeamish.

But they had other work before them.

Howard's force, small as it was, and only meant to take possession of the house near the castle, was well put together, and contained several Englishmen, and the onslaught made upon the party surrounding Lydia was no child's play.

The fact of Howard and his men dismounting may seem strangely bad policy.

But it was not.

In those perilous passes a charge of horsemen would have been risking a terrible danger.

They might, in dashing down upon their adversaries, be precipitated over the edge of some fearful precipice.

So it was wise policy which induced Howard and his party, being on higher ground, to make their rush upon their enemies on foot.

A desperate rush it was.

Knife and sword were only used at first, as I have said.

The presence of Lydia was enough to stop all firing.

But she was not long with them.

By a sudden and well-executed ruse, Leoni and his men contrived to get Lydia past the combatants, and bear her upwards towards the mountains.

Here, at a short distance, he left her, risking the fact of his having to leave two men to guard her out of his small force.

The battle was now waged on a different principle.

There being no longer any danger in firing pistols were drawn, and the mountains re-echoed with the repeated reports.

Deadly execution was now done.

At such close quarters men were soon desperately wounded on both sides; and Leoni and Howard were both shot through the arm almost at the beginning of the fray.

However, a strange and sudden end was put to the conflict.

The sound of firing was heard not far off.

It seemed, however, not like any one firing in combat, but as a signal.

"We must end this as quickly as possible," cried Howard to Jack Gale; "the government troops are, as you know, in pursuit of Leoni, and if they reach this point we shall not only lose our prey, but we may be included in the attack. Come, boys, let us make one more resolute dash upon our enemies."

They obeyed him at once.

All rushed forward furiously.

But it proved a perilous experiment.

The pirates, under Leoni, had been driven back by the last rush of Jack Gale and his companions, and had taken their stand upon the edge of the rocks, where they were shaded by lofty fir-trees.

As Howard and his men approached them, the pirates at once gave way, and in their impetuous rush several of the assailants went headlong over.

Among these were Jack Gale and Howard.

A wild yell escaped the lips of each as they went over; and at once the others were disorganized.

"It's no use remaining here," cried Ben, "when Jack and the captain are gone; and even the lady ain't here. We'd better go and meet the military, and see what we can do."

"But you don't think that Master Jack's dead, really," said Tom Meadows.

"No, I ain't a-going to settle down to that, nohow," said Ben Brace; "it's my idea that Master Jack's like a cat, and has got nine lives. We shall find him all right somewhere."

Ben and the others accordingly commenced to retreat.

This under ordinary circumstances would have been perilous work.

But now it was not.

Neither Howard nor those under him understood land-fighting as well as Leoni and his men, who had oftentimes done service with the brigands in the mountain passes.

The former knew nothing of the ins and outs, the steep defiles and mysterious precipices of those strange hills, whereas to Leoni everything of the kind was familiar.

The latter, however, had no desire to make much of a fight of it.

He knew what was behind—the danger if he remained there of being come upon by the officers of the law, who had tracked him even to the private house to which he had taken Lydia Harden.

So when he saw Ben Brace and the others yielding, he made only a pretense of pursuit.

And then, hastening off as quickly as he could, he rejoined the other two, and with Lydia in their midst, they once more resumed their ascent of the mountains.

During the whole of the combat Lydia had made no attempt to speak.

Her heart yearned towards her sister's friends. But she dared not betray her presence to them.

If she did so, she ran the risk at once of creating a fierce anger in Leoni's breast.

And, when he was under the influence of anger, she knew that he was greatly to be dreaded.

So, though her heart went out to them, though she longed to see them triumphant, she was compelled to remain silent.

Silent also when she saw that once more they were following their way up the dark hill-path.

Only for a time, though.

Her eager curiosity in regard to her friends became at last too strong to bear.

She felt that she must ask the fate of the brave ones who had so often risked their lives for her.

"What of the English youth and his friends, Leoni," she asked, as the pirate rode along silently by her side, "are they dead?"

Leoni laughed.

"I did not trouble myself to see," he cried, "it was enough that we conquered."

"But they would never have yielded if they had not been dead, or so disabled as to be utterly unable to move hand or foot," she cried; "they were too brave to fly."

"They received no injuries from us," said Leoni, "save a mere pistol shot through the arm. They made a dash at our men, who opened the way for them to pass, and they went impetuously over the edge of the cliff."

"Over the cliff's edge!" said Lydia, in a low voice of terror; "then they are dead?"

"We did not pause to inquire," said Leoni, "as I said before. You, as my promised wife, ought not to be sorry."

"Sorry," cried Lydia, "I have every reason to be. Did you not promise to befriend Jack Gale and his companions? Did you not swear that if I pledged my word to you to be your wife, you would bring to me my sister, her lover, and his companions in safety?"

"I did, but I could not think of all that when Jack Gale was trying to blow my brains out," said Leoni. "Your sister was not with them, and her lover was fighting side by side with my bitterest foe, Ralph Howard. I must put an end to this misunderstanding."

He said this in such a significant and savage tone that there was no mistaking his meaning.

Lydia thought it best to be quiet.

But Leoni was thoroughly roused now.

He did not make much remark in regard to the matter.

But he had conceived in his own mind an entirely new view of the question, which was anything but favorable to Lydia.

She meanwhile was quite paralyzed, as it were, by the apparent hopelessness of her situation.

There seemed no way out of her forlorn condition.

And so, seeing presently that her tyrant showed no further disposition to talk, and that he was evidently brooding over something, she remained quite silent, her heart full of anxious grief.

And so at length they reached the village of Spezzia.

A feeling of overwhelming sorrow and despair overcame the English girl as she found herself once more in this place.

With it the commencement almost of her troubles was associated, and when she once more sank to sleep in the little cottage, where the treacherous Bernardo had made his false compact with her, her dreams were of the wildest and most terrible description.

She saw the bloodstained and ghastly corpses of Jack Gale and Ralph Howard lying impaled upon spiked rocks far down below the spot where they had fought.

Then she beheld herself in the mountain cave being married to Leoni; while the skeleton of Ernest Harden, with a gory and horrible head, and outstretched bony fingers, advanced towards them threateningly.

And then, with a low cry of horror, she awoke.

Lydia was alone when she awoke, and the remembrance of where she was, and the situation she was in, almost for the moment upset her reason.

She had, in fact, gone through so much that it would not have been wonderful if she had again lost her senses.

But hope is a very strong comforter.

And so, even in the face of the fact that she was in the power of Leoni, she roused up her strength to bear the ills that threatened her.

On the morning after the fight on the mountains Leoni presented himself after she had partaken of breakfast.

"Signora Harden," he said, "I wish you to renew your promise in writing. I am now going to Reggio, where I believe your sister is to be, in order to perform what I have sworn to accomplish for you. I shall, by so doing, be thrusting myself into danger greater than you can imagine. But, if I can show your written promise that you are to be my wife in five months' time, I shall have protection where I might otherwise meet with opposition and enmity."

This was coming to the point with a vengeance.

But what could Lydia do?

She was in this man's power—there he stood before her waiting. Paper, pen, ink were on the table.

She had given her promise, why then should she refuse to do as he desired?

Oh! if she only knew Emily's address.

If she—but a sudden thought calmed her fears.

This paper was only to be used by Leoni to insure his own safety, and the consent of her sister to accompany him up the hills.

She would soon see her, then she could tell her all, and explain the apparently heartless manner in which she seemed to be giving up the husband she had loved so well, and whose death was only guaranteed by Leoni.

"Very well, I will sign," she said, and she then wrote a short letter to Emily, asking her to come at once with Leoni, accompanied by Jack and his friends—if our hero was still alive.

"All is changed now," she added. "Ernest being dead, I have consented to marry Leoni; so come at once."

"Good," said the Italian pirate, as she closed and addressed it. "I will again risk my life for you. I hope in a few hours your sister will be here."

And, passing out, he went quickly away with a saturnine and evil smile upon his lips.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SPLIT IN THE CAMP.

"AND who, may I ask, set Leoni over us? Why can't he remain on board ship, and fish for his prey amid the blue waves of the Mediterranean, instead of coming here to interfere with us who don't want him?"

The speaker was a man about thirty, a dark-haired, swarthy fellow, but by no means an ugly specimen of humanity.

He had large, black eyes, with a fierce expression.

He was known as Leonardo.

A friend of Rinaldo's, he was yet accused of being a little jealous of his authority.

How he became a member of the band was a mystery.

In fact, there was a mystery about him altogether.

He had rushed into the haunts of the brigands one day—hunted, bloodstained, wounded, and he had asked for protection.

"Join my band and I will afford it to you," was Rinaldo's reply.

The stranger had seemed somewhat taken back for a moment.

Then he whispered to the brigand chief a few words which seemed to surprise him.

"That is of no consequence," was the reply of Rinaldo; "it is so much the more reason why you should join."

And he did.

What was the secret of the whisper no one yet knew.

At any rate, he had, up to this time, joined in every risky adventure which had befallen the band of Rinaldo.

In fact, he had seemed to throw himself in the way of danger.

Wherever there was a chance of winning distinction among his fellows, there was he to be found.

But there had been from the first a kind of jealousy apparent between him and Rinaldo, from no reason, he it said, that any one could understand, except perhaps that both were handsome men.

However, this feeling of almost angry jealousy showed itself all the more intensely against Leoni.

He had been away this morning upon some

secret mission of his own, when, flinging himself down by the fire, he gave vent to the above remark.

"I am afraid, Leonardo," said one of the group, a hard-faced fellow called Angelo, "you're in the wrong box this time."

"How so?"

"Because it is Rinaldo himself who set him over us, as you call it. Here is his own letter, we have all read it. Do you believe it now?"

Leonardo read the letter carefully.

Then, with a discontented air, he flung it from him.

"I think Rinaldo might have chosen one of ourselves to lord it in the mountains when he is away," he said, "instead of a stranger, whose interests are bound up in his crew and his adventures on the ocean. Well, well, it is done and can't be undone; but he won't get much civility out of me, I'm thinking."

Some of them laughed and nodded knowingly.

But the others were in no way partial to internal quarrels.

There were constant quarrels and hand-to-hand encounters between them and the government troops; there were fights, too, whenever wealthy travelers came well protected up the mountain-paths.

It was just as Leonardo's words had created an unpleasant feeling, and caused most of the faces around to look more or less morose, that the object of their conversation made his appearance suddenly.

He had just quitted the cottage when Leonardo had given vent to his unpleasant remarks, and, hearing his name mentioned, the pirate chief had quickly secreted himself behind a jagged piece of rock, where he could hear all and not be seen.

He listened with an amused look on his bold and handsome face—handsome with the beauty of the evil one.

Again and again he made a step forward as if unable to resist the temptation of striding up to and chastising the insolence of the speaker.

But some strange feeling held him spell-bound.

He waited until the handsome grumbler had had his say, and then he suddenly appeared before the group.

"So, Leonardo," he said with a good-humored smile, partly real, partly assumed, "you do not approve of my being in charge of the village, during your chief's absence?"

"Talk of the devil," cried Leonardo, turning over on his elbow with indolent ease, and glaring up into the face of the new-comer.

Whatever thoughts might have before this been in Leoni's mind were quite dissipated by the manner of the speaker.

If there was one thing more than another that the pirate hated it was want of discipline, want of belief in the "ruling power."

Like most persons who rebel against constituted authority, he was a perfect tyrant himself, and he evidently thought as much of Rinaldo's authority as his own; at any rate of his power of delegating his power to another.

He strode across at once to Leonardo, and stooping slightly, struck him in the face.

It was a daring thing to do.

But Leoni was never behindhand in anything which necessitated courage and resolution of the highest and most reckless degree.

He knew in such a case as this that instant and courageous action was necessary.

The blow acted like magic.

Leonardo leaped up like one bewitched, and aimed a furious return blow at Leoni.

In an instant the swords of both men flashed from their scabbards, and a deadly fight was initiated.

Perhaps if Leoni had imagined for a moment what would be the result of his precipitate action, he might have hesitated before acting so impulsively.

But he did not.

He felt that he must assert his dignity, and that was a thing to which nothing stood second.

There was another thing which made Leoni reckless as to these encounters.

He had the most wonderful belief in his own destiny.

He thoroughly believed—like Napoleon—that his star was a fortunate one.

In this contest he was quite willing to admit that he had an adversary worthy of his steel, and was accordingly careful in his thrusts and parries.

But he had not the least doubt as to the result.

Lydia in her room in the cottage heard the clashing of steel, and wondered.

She little knew how greatly her own interests were bound up in the conflict, not in reference to the possible death of Leoni, but in reference to the death or escape of the other.

While he lived Leonardo would never forget that blow.

He had leaped from his reclining posture by the fire with the full intention of killing Leoni.

But yet he was not reckless in his movements. With hatred boiling over at his heart, he was calm and cool as a professed duelist.

Leoni was equally calm—an amused smile as before playing over his lips.

His skill, however, soon began to tell.

Leonardo, bleeding from several trifling wounds, was gradually driven down the incline leading from the brigands' haunts towards the broad mountain road leading to Reggio.

He made most frantic efforts to regain the ground he had lost.

His sword flashed and writhed about like some living thing.

But in vain.

Leoni's wrist was truly of steel, his self-possession grand.

The same indomitable spirit which made him the leader in desperate attacks on board his own vessel, made him able to restrain himself when he was engaged in single combat.

Fighting fiercely, therefore, striving in every way to foil the cool resolute man, who seemed to hold his fate in his hand, Leonardo was at length driven far down the hill away from the fire, whence he had leaped to the attack, Leoni's men and Rinaldo's following to see the desperate fighting.

No one interfered.

Of course, any combination among them would at once have ended in the destruction of Leoni in an instant.

But there was no thought of such a thing in the minds of any of them.

Leoni, in Rinaldo's absence, was considered to hold perfect sway, and it was only the newly-joined Leonardo that dared to dispute it.

Presently a shout arose from the lips of all assembled.

Leoni had driven his adversary to his knee, and was lifting his sword to strike—to give the *coup de grace*.

Only an instant this would have taken.

But in that instant something happened.

Leonardo suddenly dropped on the ground, and as the blow descended he leaped up, throwing Leoni on his back.

"All is fair in love and war."

So goes the proverb.

But the brigands did not think so in this instance, and a warning shout, together with an unexpected rush, told Leonardo that his action was condemned.

He had resolved to kill the pirate chief as he lay on the ground.

But he had no chance.

The brigands were close to him, and several muskets were raised to fire.

He drew backwards from Leoni.

Then he raised his sword aloft, and cried, as the pirate slowly rose:

"I go for vengeance. Hindered by your men from finishing this combat properly, I will seek revenge elsewhere."

Leoni gave a rapid order to his men.

But it was of no use.

Leonardo had planned his escape ever since the moment when he found that Leoni was getting the best of the battle; and now, in one instant, he had swung himself into the branches of a tree, and dropped over the steep precipice.

Leoni with a terrible oath sprang forward.

Leaping over the gulf he saw Leonardo leaping from rock to rock, and from branch to branch.

Just below the spot, where the battle was ended, there was a succession of boldly jutting rocks, with here and there a sturdy Alpine fir.

Leonardo evidently knew the spot well.

He sprang from rock to rock, and from tree to tree with the ease of a chamois.

He was within gunshot, and at the order of Leoni, he was fired at again and again.

But he seemed, like the pirate chief, to bear a charmed life; and he disappeared presently far down below, while a mocking laugh came faintly up from the depths of the mountain abyss.

As Leoni glanced over, there was a peculiar look upon his face.

This was the exact spot where Jack Gale and Ralph the Avenger fell over the night before.

Could it be possible that after all they had escaped?

Drawing himself back from the contemplation of the giddy height, he walked moodily in the rear of the brigands.

When he had reached the plateau where the fire was lit, and where the men had been sitting, he gave directions to them to keep an extraguard everywhere.

Sentries were posted at every imaginable point, and all precautions taken to insure against surprise.

"If the soldiers do come upon us, they'll have a warm reception. That I can promise them," he cried. "I will wait and see what turns up before I go to Reggio. If I am not careful I shall be beaten after all. What I shall do is to keep out of the way of Lydia Harden until there is some hope that those two meddlers are done for, and then I can afford to wait. If not, our plans must be altered."

Leoni did not keep absolutely within the limits of the village.

He made mysterious short journeys now and again about the neighborhood, but he was never very long gone, and had a knack of turning up just when he was least expected.

To Lydia this was indeed a wearisome life.

It was just evening on the third day that Leoni burst eagerly into the room.

Lydia saw in a moment from the look of the pirate chief that something was the matter.

She started up, naturally in some alarm.

"What is the matter? Have you bad news for me?"

This was her instant question.

Leoni hesitated a moment.

He had no news of her friends, because he had been nowhere where he could have heard anything of them.

Instead of going in search of them he had, as we know, been loitering about the hills.

"I have no news of your friends, if you allude to them," he said.

"Do you not know whether their rashness was the cause of their death?" she faltered.

"I do not; but I have examined carefully the spot where they fell," said Leoni, "and I think there is reason to believe that they are safe; or at any rate they have not died. They may have been wounded, but I think you may be certain that it went no further. But I have something of more moment to speak of. There must be no further delay. We must be married at once."

Lydia recoiled in horror.

"At once! And why? Why should anything alter our contract?"

"The fact that one of my men has betrayed me," replied Leoni; "the soldiers are advancing on all sides, and in a few hours it will be too late. I wish therefore to secure you."

"And what if I refuse?" said Lydia, trembling in every limb.

Leoni laughed harshly.

"Refuse!" he cried; "that is impossible! It is too late! Here comes the priest."

As he spoke, two of the pirates and two of the brigands entered, followed by a man dressed in priest's vestments.

It seemed indeed too late!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PLAN OF RESCUE—THE BATTLE—A SAD DIS-APPOINTMENT.

WE must now return to Ralph Howard and Jack Gale.

When they saw it was quite impossible to catch the *Thunder*, as it skimmed along the blue waters, they directed their course at once towards the shores of Italy.

Here it was most probable they would again find Leoni.

At any rate, it would be possible to buy a vessel, which would enable them to prosecute the search for the pirate and his prey.

With a fair wind, the old *Madrid* was not long in reaching the port of Reggio, where the first thing they saw was the *Thunder*.

It was wonderful how things seemed, after the arrival of Ralph Howard on the shores of Italy, to fall into his hands at first.

Arriving there as he had planned at a spot called Darnia not far from Reggio, he anchored some distance out at sea, and went ashore in his gig with Jack and Ben and Tom, and three Italians.

The latter were left in the boat, while Ralph and his English friends went ashore.

The Italians were told to row about gently, until signal was given by a lantern being waved on the beach.

"What is your idea?" asked Jack Howard as they walked along the beach towards the village of Darnia.

"I must dispose first of the treasure we have on board ship," said Ralph; "the money may be all very well, but Spanish doubloons are dangerous things to tender, and crosses and so forth are not articles to tender publicly. We might chance to find that we were selling them to the original owner."

There was a dry humor in some of Ralph's remarks in spite of his sternness.

"What are you going to do then?" said Jack.

"Well, I know a man up here; he will change everything for me," replied Howard; "only that

instead of living in some dark and gloomy street, he resides in a little cave in the hills. He has as pretty a little lugger as ever you saw, and he will whisk these things off to foreign parts, whither I know not. Even to me he does not tell his secrets."

"He is a Jew, I suppose?"

"Yes, Emmanuelo Levi," said Howard; "but to us he is very liberal; and has on many perilous occasions been known to hide in his place, or near it, some of us wild sea-rovers."

"And when you have disposed of your treasures—what then?" said Jack.

"I must buy a ship—also through Emmanuelo," said Howard.

"And then?"

"We must rescue Mistress Lydia Harden from the clutches of her enemies."

"And what are you going to do with the merchantman?" said Jack.

"Sell it," said Howard. "After we have dismantled it, Emmanuelo will sell it for me as a derelict we found in mid-ocean. He will buy anything, and get rid of it while other people would be dreaming of it."

By this time, of course, they had gone a considerable distance.

Pausing, then, at a point where the ground rose suddenly, and sloped upwards to form high hills, Howard looked anxiously round him.

But if he feared he was watched, his dread was utterly groundless.

Not a human being appeared in sight.

"We are in luck's way," said the pirate; "let us turn up here quickly to the right, and in a few moments we shall reach the headquarters of the man we want to see."

And so, apparently light-hearted, he led the way up the hill-path.

They had not very far to go.

They came presently to a very wooded part, where Howard turned suddenly to the left; and passing along a narrow and somewhat perilous path, came upon a spot where a dim light was visible.

"We must halt here a moment," said Howard, "while I give the signal. And before I do so, pray remember that you must for the moment pass as members of my crew, or you would be in danger. Not only that, you would imperil my bargains, and then we could no longer be friends."

These words were very significant.

Jack had sufficient regard for Ralph Howard's idea of honor to believe that he meant the oath he had sworn, the declaration he had made when he had said that he would—after our hero's generous behavior—be his friend for life.

But still it was possible, though the pirate might not do him any real injury, that he might thwart him in many ways.

"Very well," said Jack. "I will instruct my friends. But let me ask this—how long shall we be over these arrangements? for I fear it will not be safe to leave Emily on board the *Madrid* for any length of time."

"You need not fear for my crew," said Howard. "Anything of mine is sacred; any friend of mine is sacred also. And, besides, Hugh Brandon is in charge, and to him I would trust my life and my honor. Once my friend, always my friend."

"I must rely on him then as you do," said Jack, "but, of course, I am all eagerness to return to her with tidings of her sister."

Howard raised his fingers to his lips, and gave a long, shrill whistle, with a peculiar note towards the end of it.

In a few moments the light they had observed grew brighter.

Then a broad belt of illumination poured across the path as from a door being opened, and three distinct piping notes were heard in reply.

"Ha! ha!" cried Howard, delightedly. "I am not deceived. He is there! Let us press on!"

In a few minutes they had reached the door of the Jew's strange dwelling.

To any one entering it for the first time, there would have appeared nothing peculiar in it.

It was merely a small hut, built of wide pieces of timber, hung with faded tapestry, carpeted with goat skins, and made as warm and comfortable as such a place could be.

Pictures, and antlers of deer, and weapons of various kinds adorned the walls, and a blazing fire was on the hearth.

He stood at the door to welcome them.

He was a most extraordinary being in appearance.

His hair hung long and loose over his shoulders white and thick.

His form was draped in a gaberdine, with a cord round his waist; a skull-cap adorned his head, and his hand held a pipe which would have delighted the heart of a Dutchman.

He held out a long, skinny hand to Howard as he saw him approach.

"Ha, Howard," he said, "I am glad to see you. I knew your signal at once, though it is so long since I heard it. Ha, ha! We know our old friends."

"So it seems," replied Howard, "and in return we will not forget you. These are my comrades, and you need not be afraid of saying anything, you like before them. So let us all enter and go somewhere where there are no listeners."

The Jew cast a rapid glance at the party.

Then, without further hesitation, he admitted them, and having closed the outer door, led the way into the first of the caves, which Howard had mentioned.

When they entered, a piece of woodwork slipped in a most ingenious manner into its place, and made it seem as if they were in some apartment without any outlet at all.

The discussion between the Jew and the pirate was a mere squabble about money, the relative value of things, and the quickness with which Levi could obtain for him a new ship.

The question now was, whether to return to the ship, or remain in the cave all night.

Levi advised the latter.

Howard's next visit would have to be paid in the daylight; and that was a thing which the Jew regarded as anything but pleasant.

So it was arranged in accordance with the wish of Emmanuelo; and an inner cave was put "ship-shape" to a certain extent, to admit of their resting there till morning.

Levi produced the materials for a good supper, and then the old man, having received many more instructions from Howard, left them.

"I shall be back as soon as possible," he said, "but do not look for me till late to-morrow evening."

And so he went forth upon his peculiar mission, and they were left to amuse themselves as they best could.

The time went very heavily on their hands as may be supposed.

But at length the old man returned, just as the evening of the next day was coming on.

He had done a wonderful piece of work, he said.

He could offer Howard now the cash he wanted, that is, directly he had seen the treasure on board the *Madrid*; he could send him to a man who would sell him a ship, and find him a purchaser for the *Madrid*.

"You have been working miracles then," said Howard with a smile. "Where have you found a ship for me so easily?"

The Jew laughed.

"It was in the harbor at Reggio."

"The name?"

"The *Wolf of the Waves*."

Howard glanced at him in astonishment.

"You are mocking me now," he said. "The *Wolf of the Waves*, Leoni's vessel, has been sunk in the ocean long since."

"Truly," said the Jew, "but this is another ship, re-christened. The government have seized upon it, taken everything out of it, dispersed the crew, and put it up for sale."

"By St. Peter! It is the old *Thunder*," cried Ralph, joyously; "but for whom did you say you wished to buy it?"

"For the captain of an English merchantman," said the Jew. "The story I told was this—that you had been attacked by a ship, which was suspiciously like the *Wolf of the Waves*, and had succeeded with a few of your crew in taking to the boats and escaping. You then came across a derelict, the *Madrid*, which you took possession of and navigated as best you could to Darnia. This vessel being of no use to you now, as you and your men desire to hasten off to England, you wish to sell the *Madrid* and buy the other vessel."

"The deuce!" cried Ralph, "your plan is a very daring one. If they knew the number of the crew on board the *Madrid*, there would be a fine to do! I hope you have so arranged matters that they won't go aboard until I have had time to clear my fellows out?"

"Yes, yes! all is well," said the Jew. "This very night your men must be got ashore, and to-morrow you can come with me to the authorities, but you will have to borrow some clothes from me. You look too much like a wild sea rover now to please the critical eye of Signor Vansanello, the head of the police."

"You are right," said Howard, with a grim smile, "but we had better lose no time. I have been so deceived lately that I wish to give no one the chance of doing so again."

"We will go directly," said Emmanuelo, "but there is another piece of news, which I am sure you will be glad to hear. You know the English lady in whom you take an interest?"

"Yes," chorused all eagerly.

"She is not far off."

"So I thought," said Jack, "when you said that the *Wolf of the Waves* was in the harbor at Reggio. But where is she?"

"She is in a house a little distance up the hill from Reggio," said Levi; "she has been placed there by Leoni, but one of his men, angry with his captain because he jeered his crew at the result of the engagement with the *Madrid*, revealed to me the secret of her place of concealment."

"Everything seems falling into our hands now," said Howard; "we have only to be resolute, and make no delay."

"Just so," said Levi, "and be circumspect too, for I know Leoni, the pirate chief, as well as you do, and am well aware that he will be a match for you, if you do not be careful."

No delay was made.

They set off as soon as darkness had really set in, and Howard proceeded at once towards the ship.

The transfer of the crew from the vessel to the shore was accomplished in an amazingly short space of time, and then the cumbersome old vessel was brought close up to the shore, and Emily was conducted by Howard, Jack, and his friends, to a place of safety, not far from the beach.

It was in fact rather astonishing under the circumstances to think how close Emily and Lydia were to one another without knowing it.

Both Howard and Jack deemed it prudent to keep silent as to the whereabouts of Lydia, as Emily might express a wish to go with them.

They told her simply that her sister was not far off as well as they could ascertain, and that they might, by the exercise of great discretion, come across her place of concealment.

This satisfied her for a time, and then, as we have already pointed out, they made their way as quickly as they could to the house which had been rented by Leoni, and were successful in seeing Lydia through an interstice in the garden wall, and in throwing her a letter.

The reason of the failure of their enterprise we have already seen.

Then came the attack upon the pirates in the passes, which ended in Howard and Jack falling headlong over the rocky precipice.

It seemed indeed a miracle that they were not instantly dashed to atoms.

They were caught in the branches of the giant pines, which Leoni had afterwards gazed at with so much fury when he had been beaten in the contest with Leonardo.

It was a tremendous fall, and every bone and muscle in their bodies was shaken.

But still, with the pluck and energy of men who have been used to roughing it, and have met death face to face in all shapes, they kept their presence of mind as they descended the dark abyss, and seized the branches as they neared them.

The branches of the fir-trees broke their fall to a certain extent, but still when they at last swung themselves clear of all obstructions, and were once more on what may be called *terra firma*, they were glad to crawl to the first place of rest.

It was rest for the body, however; not for the mind.

They found themselves pretty fairly located in a shepherd's hut, but their minds were on the work constantly, wondering what could have become of Ben Brace and his companions.

Had they seen the disaster, which had occurred to their leaders, or had they gone blindly on with the combat, and been utterly overpowered by the numbers of their foes?

At daybreak they made their way discomfited towards their headquarters.

Ralph Howard was in a terrible state of anxiety and anger.

"The devil's flown away with my luck, I think," said he. "Leoni has sprung a mine on me, but, by the Furies! I'll have my revenge yet. I have dreamed again that his black heart is doomed to be transfixed by my sword, and I believe it is true."

At head-quarters they found Ben Brace and Tom, and some of the men.

The others had succumbed.

The meeting was a joyous one.

Neither side had doubted that some catastrophe had befallen the other.

But they did not lose time in congratulations.

Ralph the Avenger resolved to attempt a desperate deed.

He was now in the uniform of the captain of an English merchantman, and had been seen by the authorities.

He determined, therefore, boldly to claim the aid of the government troops in attacking the stronghold of the brigands and rescuing Lydia.

He lost no time in carrying out this plan.

He was received, too, with open arms.

Leoni the pirate was a man long feared by the authorities on the Italian seaboard, and the chance of catching him, and Rinaldo, the brigand chief, also, while there were troops to spare for the business, was one not to be lightly cast aside.

It was this intelligence that caused Leoni to hasten back with such precipitancy, and to insist upon the instant marriage of himself and Lydia.

But there was one great reason why the authorities had so eagerly espoused Howard's cause, a reason which must not be lost sight of.

Leonardo, the escaped brigand, had been there before him.

He had sworn revenge, and he paused at nothing to carry it out.

He had at once acknowledged to the authorities that he was a brigand, but he had also told them of golden treasures which he could produce to them, and offered to guide them to the spot where they could muzzle and kill the "lion" who had so long defied them.

"And now, *cospetto!*" cried the Governor of Reggio, Signor Vansanello, "we shall only want to catch that other desperate villain, Signor Ralpho Hovardo, the English pirate, and we shall have cleared the seas of two great pests."

"I have heard that the pirate, Ralph Howard, is a man not easily caught; but you can at least try," said Howard.

But he thought:

"That is one scored against you, Signor Vansanello. Wait until I have a chance."

* * * * *

It was early dawn when they approached the confines of Leoni's domain, as it may be called, while he was acting for Rinaldo.

Leoni was on the alert.

Again his evil purposes against Lydia had been thwarted.

The mere sight of the priest seemed to turn her blood.

She gave a look of stony horror all round her, a look which included every one in the rocky chamber, and then, with a loud shriek, she fell on the floor, senseless.

The priest, as we know, was not Alfieri.

He was one who had been pressed into the service partly by fear, and partly on the understanding that Leoni possessed the lady's written consent to be his wife.

He put up his book.

"The ceremony cannot proceed," said he sternly, "the letter you hold from this lady must be a forgery, or my presence would not have affected her in this way. I refuse to go on further."

In vain Leoni threatened.

The priest cared not.

They might kill him, he said, but they should not alter his determination.

And, indeed, if they had succeeded, they would have found their efforts of no avail, for Lydia, a the very idea of the marriage, had relapsed into her old state of dreamy, senseless horror.

Leoni was beside himself with rage.

He seemed indeed at first, as if he would have plunged his stiletto into the fair bosom of the one who defied and conquered him.

But other things claimed his attention.

Scouts were coming in continually with the news that the military were approaching, that Leonardo had escaped, and was guiding them, and so, leaving the woman whom he now hated so deeply to be taken care of by Juanita and the other girls, he went out to place his scouts and sentries.

By morning Spezzia was in a state of defense such as it had never been placed in before.

There had been desultory visits from the military in search of persons who had been spirited away for the purpose of ransom, but they had never, as now, expected an attack from the soldiers on a large scale.

They were left no time for thought in the morning.

Every road to the brigand villages bristled with the flashing bayonets and swords of the approaching host.

Things looked serious.

None knew this better than Leoni.

When the government bestirred itself like this he knew that they meant fighting to the death.

But he smiled when some one suggested "capture."

"No, no," he said, shaking his head. "No one will ever capture Leoni. They may kill him, but they will never take him alive."

The battle began in earnest at once.

The soldiers, veterans who had faced the French, came up the hill paths merrily, right in the teeth of the fire, which seemed to be poured forth from every crevice and fissure and from behind every jagged rock.

Their numbers were quickly thinned by the in-

cessant rush of bullets from enemies whom they could not see, or whom they could, at any rate, only distinguish by a hat or a face, or an arm seen suddenly, and for a moment.

But they went on bravely.

They knew that after a certain point they would come to places where they would be able to meet their enemies in the open, face to face and sword to sword.

The brigands were unprepared for such desperate valor as this.

They were brave enough.

But their idea of warfare was purely of the guerrilla type.

They liked the broad trunk of a tree, a wide boulder, a wall, or even a clump of brushwood behind which they could hide while their enemies were marching along, unprotected, in the open.

And so they were utterly discomfited and surprised when they saw the Italian troops, with Jack, and Ben Brace, and Tom Meadows, and a giant dressed as an English merchant captain, advance steadily up the slopes, leaving dead and wounded alike in their wake, but ever advancing.

At length the plateau was reached.

Four parties of soldiers converged on the spot.

And here the brigands, headed by Leoni, made a stand.

The stand was made opposite the cave where Lydia was a captive, for at the approach of danger she had been quickly removed from the cottage, where she could have been too easily captured by her friends.

But the stand was not for long.

The brigands were brave enough truly.

But they could not battle against the steady volleys of the troops.

And when they charged they broke and fled like a flock of sheep.

Leoni saw all was over, and he made a dash into the caves.

His idea no doubt was to kill Lydia or to drag her into some inner recesses of the cavern, but when he was followed he was not there.

Lydia was lying on a heap of goatskins, pale, ill and anxious, but still more like herself; near her were crouching, in deadly fear, Juanita and other Italian girls.

But there was no sign of Leoni.

The Italian commander saw at once that not one of these women knew anything of the whereabouts of the pirate, and so, leaving Jack Gale and his friends in charge of Lydia, they began to search the other caves and the cottages.

In one of the former, where many men had crawled to die or hide themselves from their pursuers, they found a monk of the Benedictine order, blood-besmeared and wounded, and bound hand and foot.

On being released he told them that he had seen Leoni for a moment, disguising himself in the clothes of a dead Italian trooper, and then flying to join the soldiers.

But he seemed too weak and ill through bad treatment to say much, and the search for Leoni was abandoned.

The troops lost no time in re-forming, and with Lydia and many prisoners in their midst, they made their way towards Reggio.

It was a brilliant afternoon as they neared the town, and there was a brief pause as they reached a narrow path which led up to the convent of St. Angelo.

Here the strange priest asked to be allowed to proceed to his monastery.

"If they wanted him as evidence against any of the robbers," he said, "it would be easy enough to find him at St. Angelo."

It was a very thickly wooded part just where this path branched off.

Jack and the others coming up as the priest was speaking to the Italian captain, saw the holy man and recognized him at once.

"Alfieri the monk!" they cried, as with one breath, and sprang forward.

But it was too late, whatever was their intention.

He had disappeared.

"That false monk again," muttered Jack; "there is always danger when he is about."

"Ay," said Howard, "and as I know his place of abode it will not be long before he receives a visit from me."

"What a pity we did not see him before; I think that we could have told enough to the commanding officer to warrant his detention," said Jack, "we know him to be a friend of Leoni's."

"Yes, his very shadow," said Howard; "however, as the rascal knows me well I will not run the risk of discovery now. We will visit him at his convent of St. Angelo, kidnap him if possible, and bring him on board the *Thunder*. But now we must be discreet."

"Perhaps it is best," said Jack; "we do not want any further upset now."

Arrived at Reggio, Howard and Jack thanked the commander, and then left him to carry the exhausted but delighted Lydia to the house where her sister was awaiting her.

Their meeting is almost indescribable.

Their joy, as may be expected, was superabundant in its expression; and Howard presently discreetly left them to themselves, Jack, Ben and Tom remaining ashore while he went on board the *Thunder* to get everything ship-shape before embarking.

It was understood that they were to set sail as soon as possible for England, and meet Hugh Brandon at Portsmouth.

Then, having delivered Lydia over to the safe custody of her friends, he would press his suit.

Alas for human hopes!

It was nearly dark when Howard left them, and when at length the sisters went to bed after a long and happy evening, it was very late, and a gloomy threatening sky had settled down on the landscape and the wide ocean.

However, as the *Thunder* had been at anchor just outside the bay, Jack made no difficulty in going on board.

They were sure to see even in the darkness, a ship at anchor so near the harbor bar.

So, in spite of the fact that no boat had been sent to take them on board the vessel, they chartered a wherry and pulled off over the waters, which looked as black as ink.

On reaching the sea outside the harbor they saw only one ship there, the dark hull looming up out of the waves indistinctly, but looking like the *Thunder*, with its slender build and general contour.

Jack and his friends pulled right under it, into its deep shadow.

"Ship ahoy!" shouted Ben Brace with his hands in the form of a trumpet.

"Who is it?" answered a voice in English, but with an accent which reminded them of one of Howard's Spanish sailors.

"Jack Gale."

"Come on board then."

In a few moments Jack and his companions had clambered on board, and were at once the center of a curious group holding lanterns.

And among the group Jack recognized with a sickening heart Captain Lefevre.

Instead of boarding the *Thunder* they had boarded the *Vulture*, the prize which the French had wrested from the English.

He advanced with outstretched hand as he saw Jack.

"What!" he cried, "Monsieur Gale! This is unexpected."

He was truly astonished.

So were all the crew.

They had imagined our three brave heroes lost forever, swallowed up long ago in the maw of the mighty ocean.

"Yes," replied Jack, with a face white with sorrow, "we seem to have come on board to surrender."

The words were very simple, but to the minds of the French crew they meant a great deal, and in consequence a cheer went up which made the very ocean echo.

Jack knew that he was bound in honor to do as he did, but his heart responded not to that cheer.

He thought only of the dear ones he was leaving again.

The captain shook hands with him warmly.

"I am heartily glad," he said, "to see you and your brave fellows. We had given you up for lost."

"Ah, lost; but not as having broken our paroles?" said Jack, eagerly.

"No, no," said the French captain. "But come below with me to my cabin. I am anxious to hear all you have to say."

"And I," said Jack, "to ask you another favor."

"Ben and Tom," he added, turning to his comrades, "you had better make yourselves at home for a little while. I'm going below with the captain to tell him all that has happened, and ask him to let us go to the help of our friends."

"Ay, ay, sir, do. I'm all impatience to get back. But as for making ourselves comfortable among a lot of parleyvoos that don't know a word of Christian English, why that ain't possible, even under cap'n's orders."

"Oh, you'll be all right, I have no doubt," said Jack; "but, at any rate, make the best of it."

"As fayther said, when he found two cows out o' three dead in the barn," said Tom Meadows. "Come on, Ben, let's get some frog soup."

"Well," said Captain Lefevre, when they were at length seated in the cabin, "this is one of the greatest surprises I ever had in my life. Pour yourself out some of that Burgundy, and let us drink to this wonderful meeting."

Jack did as he was directed, and they toasted each other.

"You are right, captain," said our hero; "it is wonderful. And yet I have sad news to tell you. Can you spare time to listen?"

"Yes, *mon ami*. Proceed; my lieutenant has my orders. My time is my own."

"I will make it as brief as I can," said Jack.

And as rapidly as he could he told the history of the time since he had left the deck of the *Vulture* to aid in the attack on the pirate vessel.

The French captain listened in astonishment to the wild and wonderful adventures of the three prisoners.

"Yours is quite a romance, and a sad one too," said he; "but your friends must remain for a time where they are. They are in good hands. We must sail at once to Marseilles—home to a *belle France*."

"I suppose we shall be prisoners there some time?" said Jack, bitterly.

"Well, no, I hope not," said Lefevre. "I think if I represent everything rightly to the authorities, you will be set free. And meanwhile, you can communicate with your friends. I am sure to be able to act as I should wish to be acted to."

He little thought how very small a portion of his nobility of spirit was shared by the higher authorities at home.

"What vessel is that yonder?" said Jack suddenly, as he glanced out of the cabin-window and saw the red light of a vessel at some distance off, rolling and dipping with the action of the waves.

"It looks to me like the *King of the Waves*," said Lefevre.

But Jack was overwhelmed with serious thoughts.

His first love-dream seemed over now.

He had seemed to have joy and happiness within his grasp.

He had saved those whom he loved from the clutches of Leoni, and now he had been compelled to leave them again, and that, too, in the power of Ralph Howard.

The latter, of course, was not so desperate a villain as Leoni, but still he was not one to be trusted as the guardian of Lydia Harden and Emily.

His mind was heavy with his sorrow, and life seemed to have lost its charms.

"I am truly sorry that you are my prisoner," said Captain Lefevre. "However, my duty to my country compels me to detain you as a prisoner of war."

"It matters not to me where I am or what becomes of me," said Jack, gloomily.

"Come, come," said the young Frenchman, "you must not give way like that. You are young, brave, handsome; a fine career is open to you, and you must hope, too, even against hope."

"I know all this," said Jack, "and I will do my best, but it is hard, indeed, to bear."

"It is, my friend," said Lefevre; "but you are young, and you must do your best to conquer all these feelings. I have good influence with the French government, and your stay in France will not, I am sure, be long."

Jack made no reply.

He had expected to have gone home crowned with laurels, and rendered happy by the knowledge that he had saved Emily, and that she was his own forever in this life.

But he roused himself when they had once left the shores of Italy.

Ben Brace and Tom Meadows were very dull also, impressed by their young officer's sorrow, and feeling also a sad and hopeless sensation at the idea of being once more the prisoner of "Johnny Crapaud," and of being carted off to prisoners' quarters in France.

The voyage was not a very long one.

Captain Lefevre soon disposed of the important business he had on hand.

Then he turned the nose of his vessel towards home, whither he was ordered to take his prize, the *Vulture*, in order that she might at once be put into commission.

Nothing particular occurred on the journey.

The sprightly little vessel had a good many "runs for it" from British cruisers who gave chase, but she always gave them a wide berth, and after a variety of dodgings and so forth, she arrived at Marseilles and cast anchor.

Captain Lefevre at once went ashore to confer with the authorities, and in a few hours Jack Gale, Ben Brace, and Tom Meadows were landed, and marched through the town to a place in the outskirts, known as the Tower of St. Service.

The quarters assigned to the three English captives were very comfortable.

Jack, being an officer, was at once asked if he would like to be alone, or whether he would prefer the others with him.

The answer was, of course, that he would prefer the companionship of his friends. The look-out from the windows of their room was excessively pleasant.

They were not barred, the height from the ground precluding any possibility of escape except by a rope.

Captain Lefevre took leave of them.

"When I go," he said, "do not for a moment imagine that I have forgotten you. I have already sent to Paris, relating the whole circumstances of the case, and begging them to let you be exchanged on the very first opportunity."

Jack was really sorry to say good-bye to him.

He was a thorough gentleman, and a brave man, and all three regretted him.

They could see right out upon the bay from one of the windows, and they had the melancholy pleasure, therefore, of seeing the sailing of the *Vulture*.

"We can't very well wish the vessel good luck," said Jack, "for good luck to that ship means bad luck to our country. But I can wish one thing, and that is, that whatever betide, Captain Lefevre may end his days in health, wealth, and happiness."

"And so say both of us," said Ben Brace.

They were still looking watching the *Vulture* spread her white wings to the wind, when the door opened, and M. Gervaise, the governor of the prison—as it may be justly termed—appeared.

"Ah, gentlemen," he said, "you are watching the departure of your friend, Captain Lefevre, I suppose?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Jack, "we are. He is a true and noble gentleman."

"He is, monsieur," replied M. Gervaise; "but, pray, sit down and let us have a chat. I have heard a great deal about you from Captain Lefevre," he said, "and from what he told me I think I see my way clear to lighten very much the burden of your captivity."

"How so?" asked Jack. "I am sure if you can we will be most grateful. Nothing is so irksome, as you must know, to a British sailor as confinement."

"That's just it," said M. Gervaise, as he took from his coat-pocket four little glasses and a bottle. "I have brought you up some wine to make merry with, and when we have pledged each other I will explain to you my meaning."

"Good!" said Jack.

The wine was poured out and disposed of quickly, and, as he refilled the glasses, M. Gervaise said:

"As I told you, Captain Lefevre explained everything to me, and especially that your word could be relied on."

"In that he does not overrate us," said Jack. "We look upon a man who cannot keep his *parole d'honneur* as a mean criminal."

"He is, sir, nothing better," said M. Gervaise; "but I know well how you acquitted yourself when he let you join his men in the attack on the pirate."

"Many men would have imagined we had deserted."

"Ah, but not Lefevre."

"Did he say so?"

"Yes," said M. Gervaise; "but now let us come to the point. If you will give me your word of honor to return to this place at certain hours, I will give you permission to go out into the town and have a look round you."

Jack's face beamed with delight, and he quickly told his comrades.

Tom Meadows grinned all over his sun-burnt face, while Ben Brace jumped up and did the first steps of a hornpipe, until Jack called him to order.

"You see what effect the news has on my comrades here, Monsieur Gervaise," said our hero. "I can pass my word for both them and myself. They're true as steel, and brave as lions—two qualities that mostly go together, and I am certain they would never dream of breaking their parole."

"Let it be so, then," said M. Gervaise; "and I may add that I do this at the express wish of Captain Lefevre. He won't be gone long. He's only sailed to Argente to take a dispatch, and I think when he comes back he'll be put in command of a bigger ship."

M. Gervaise had, while speaking, been spreading out on the table a piece of paper.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "if you will sign this the thing is done. You see, it is an undertaking that you, being prisoners of war, do, on your words of honor, undertake—if permitted to go beyond the precincts of the prison—to return every day punctually at the hours named."

"You see," continued M. Gervaise, "the breakfast hour is eight. At nine you can go out and remain until four if you like. You must positively come in then. After dinner you can

go out again, and remain until eight. But if you disobey these instructions you would get me into severe trouble."

"Fear not," said Jack, as he signed the paper. "Of what use would it be to us, even if we were traitors, to run away? In France I fancy three British tars would be likely just now to get more blows than favors."

Ben Brace and Tom Meadows appended their signatures, and the thing was done.

"You are quite right in one way," said M. Gervaise, as he folded the paper and placed it in his pocket, "but you forget what sort of a place is Marseilles. The population is, I can assure you, a strange mixture, and you will at all times meet mysterious men on the lookout for a crew. Avoid them like a pest-house."

"Pirates maybe."

"Privateers they are supposed to be, but they are in reality the worst of scoundrels," replied M. Gervaise; "but tell me—shall you go out this evening?"

"No," replied Jack, after a few words with Ben; "no. My friend here suggests that if there are any landsharks about it would be as well to take bearings in the daytime first."

"Quite right," said M. Gervaise; "but if you would like an hour's recreation, I can take you to the 'Café Imperial'—only yourself, mind—and I know you will enjoy a happy hour or two."

M. Gervaise was fond of a little fun.

"It seems selfish to leave my friends," said Jack.

M. Gervaise laughed.

"I cannot see that," he said. "You see, it would not be possible for me to go out with two sailors, especially English ones. I will make them happy. A wood fire, a kettle of water, some sugar, and some French brandy, and some cards. Tell them."

Jack did so at once.

"Go and enjoy yourself, Master Jack," cried Ben. "Besides, you'll be doing us good. There's nothing like keeping in with the skipper. We shall be happy with our cards and our grog. But Lor' bless ye, sir, ask him for a bit of 'baeca'."

The necessary articles for the comfort of Ben and Tom were soon procured, and about seven in the evening M. Gervaise and Jack sallied forth.

"If we've got to be in by eight," said Jack, "we haven't much time for enjoyment."

"Ah, but you're out to-night with the governor; you're under no restrictions now," said Gervaise, with a laugh. "*Allons nous!*"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AT THE "CAFÉ IMPÉRIAL"—A REMINISCENCE OF LEONI—WHO CAN IT BE?

THE "Café Imperial" was a large and handsome place.

Marseilles is a gay place—a dirty Paris in its pleasures and its general appearance—Paris given up to crowds of maritime joy-seekers, with streets full of dusky-faced men and women, who seem to have sprung from a French Rattler Highway.

The "Café Imperial" was the most splendid and the largest of all the cafes in Marseilles.

"They take things very easily, these Marseillais," said Jack, in an undertone to M. Gervaise. "Even you, monsieur, must admit that things have not been going so well with your emperor, and yet all is fun and rejoicing."

M. Gervaise smiled gayly.

"Ah, that is the secret of our success," he said, "we take our defeats easily. We run away, truly; but we soon run back again. You English are so solemn in defeat."

"Yes; but we mean something by our solemnity," said Jack; "you rarely find us beaten twice running."

"*Ventre bleu*—no!" returned M. Gervaise; "but let us not talk politics. We cannot agree over them. You love your country, I love mine, and so of what use would it be for us to argue when we wish to be friends?"

"True," said Jack; "I was wrong. But how nicely that lady sings. I must listen."

The song was indeed a very pretty one.

But it was not only for this reason that Jack did not wish to talk.

His notice had been attracted suddenly by the appearance of a man whose features seemed to carry him back to the *café* at Reggio, where he had first begun to track Leoni and his band.

Who he was he had not the most remote idea.

And yet his features seemed most strangely familiar; and more than that, they appeared to have an undoubted connection with Leoni and his ferocious band.

The man also seemed to know him, and ever and anon cast furtive looks in his direction.

This dumb show did not long escape the notice of M. Gervaise.

"Do you know that man who is watching us so anxiously?" said he, in an undertone.

"No," replied Jack.

And he whispered his doubts.

"Ha! in that case," said the governor of the prison, "he is best looked after. Nearly all the waiters in Marseilles are government spies. I will find out all about him in half an hour. When I rise and stroll away, do you remain here. I shall not be long."

In a few minutes he rose, in the interval between two songs, and passed across to the counter, where he drank something, and then went out into the street.

A moment after he was followed by the waiter who had been attending them.

As they disappeared, the man who had been observing Jack so intently rose from his seat, and, approaching our hero, sat down beside him.

"Ah, monsieur," he said, "good-evening. Where is it we have met before?"

"I have been puzzling myself in regard to that," replied Jack, "but I fancy it must have been in Italy."

"Meet me here to-morrow, then, at noon," said the mysterious man; "I cannot remain longer."

And as he saw the governor of the prison again approaching he hurried away.

"I see your friend has been over to you," said M. Gervaise suspiciously.

"My friend," said Jack, with a smile, "I know him not. He asked me where we had met before, and I told him I thought we had met in Italy. When he saw you coming he went away at once. Have you learned anything of him?"

"Yes," said M. Gervaise, "he is the mate of the Italian ship *Romola*, now lying in the bay. A suspicious ship, they say, but I shall know by the morning."

"Till then we will dismiss the subject," said Jack; "it is annoying to be watched, but I cannot see what connection this fellow can have with me or my friends."

"Ah, never fear; he has some design upon you and yours," said M. Gervaise, "but we will defeat it."

About midnight M. Gervaise and his prisoner returned to the Tower.

The next morning the three sallied forth about ten, and Jack unburdened his mind to his companions.

"I can't understand what it means," said Ben Brace; "all I can make out is that it is one of Leoni's men, and if he is, you'd better keep out of his clutches."

"You are right," said Jack. "However, I shall meet him at noon at the *Café Imperial*. He can do but little harm in the broad daylight, unless indeed he is an assassin who cares not for his own life."

"He may have valuable information to give you for money," said Ben. "However, we shall see."

At noon, after going down to the harbor and seeing the shipping and watching the shipment of thousands of French soldiers for the seat of war in Spain, they made their way to the *Café Imperial*, and sitting down by one of the marble tables, ordered some refreshment and waited.

The next moment the Italian glided stealthily to their side.

There was nothing suspicious about the Italian, no attempt at concealment.

He came in from the busy street openly, and sitting down by the side of Jack, said:

"Now I see you with your companions, I know you. You are Midshipman Gale, of the *Vulture* privateer."

"I was."

"What has happened then?"

"The *Vulture* has been captured by the French, and I am a prisoner here on parole."

"Good," said the Italian, "then there is no difficulty whatever in what I am going to propose. You are in search of Ernest Harden's wife and sister-in-law."

"Yes," said Jack, eagerly. "Are they alive?"

"I know not. But Harden himself is in a mad-house in Reggio. When he was picked out of the water he was quite gone in his head, and kept shouting for Lydia, and being unable to explain anything or do anything, in fact, but make a noise, he was put in the mad-house, as I have said."

"But the ladies?"

"I have not seen them for some time. I only know that Leoni has gone after them, and that, as he rarely fails in anything he undertakes, I have no doubt he will bring them back to Reggio. Now, if you will pay me well, I will take you thither and place you in a spot where you will be sure to meet him the instant he lands."

"But tell me who you are?" asked Jack.

"My name is Leonardo," said the man. "I was in the band of Rinaldo, the brigand chief, who was Leoni's friend. You remember that it

was I who informed you of the way to attack Leoni in his retreat in the mountains, where he had brought the Signora Harden. I swore to be revenged for his insults to me, and I will be, on every possible occasion. No revenge could be greater than taking from him the woman upon whom his mind is set."

"Well," said Jack, "I thank you much for your information, and for your kind offer, but I cannot accept it."

"Why?"

"I am a prisoner on parole. I cannot break my word."

The Italian laughed.

"Not break your word to an enemy!" he said. "*Basta!* that is good. All is fair in love and war, comrade. Come on board with me, and we will sail ere you are expected at the prison."

"You mistake us entirely," said Jack, gravely; "we English people keep our word of honor. We are on parole, and by that parole we are bound as completely as if we were under lock and key."

The Italian shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah," he said, "different people, different ideas. However, if such is your determination I cannot help you. Unless to take a letter to a madman is any use to you."

"He may be saved yet," said Jack. "So if you will take a letter for me I will pay you handsomely. I will also give you my address in the old country. For any information you can give me I shall be most grateful and will reward you, for at the earliest opportunity I shall be back in Italy; but let me tell you, you are mistaken in one thing."

"What is that?"

"Leoni has no possession of the two signoras. We saved them both."

"And yet you are prisoners here."

"Yes. Listen, and I will tell you."

Briefly Jack told him what was necessary.

The man listened in surprise.

Then he said with a smile:

"I cannot see that your friends have much bettered their condition. Ralph the Avenger is a pirate, and a desperate one, too."

"Yes; but he has more sense of honor than Leoni, and his designs are of a different nature. If you will take also a letter to the Signora Harden, you will, no doubt, be the means of restoring the wife to her husband."

"And the young signora to you," said the Italian. "Ah, signor, why do you not escape with me?"

"I have said I cannot," said Jack fiercely.

The Italian's face was, by this time, expressive of contempt.

"Well, you must forgive me," he said, "if I do not understand such feelings as those of which you are so proud. If I were in your position, I should not hesitate to escape from the keeping of enemies and seek safety in flight."

"You do not understand an Englishman's honor," said Jack.

"Good; then let me have the letter to Signor Harden, and your address, and I will do as you wish me. When shall I see you again?"

"This evening. I am coming here with my friends," said Jack, "and I will give you the letter."

They drank a glass of wine together and then parted.

Jack longed for the hour to come when he could make his way once more to Italy.

In the evening the letters were given to the ex-pirate.

And that same night he sailed for Genoa.

A fortnight passed.

A weary fortnight, in spite of the freedom which was accorded to them, and they were just beginning to despair of hearing from Paris at all, when the letter came, saying that the British vessel *Victor* would be in the harbor by permission of the authorities in four days, and that Jack and his friends were at liberty to go on board.

Jack received this intelligence with very mixed feelings.

He was of course delighted at the prospect of being once more in the old home, of seeing again his father and mother and all those who were dear to him.

But yet Emily!

Was it not like leaving her—deserting her—to go away to England in this way?

He said as much to Ben.

"You can't help yourself," said the old sailor. "You ain't deserting any one. The sooner we get home the quicker we shall get on board ship again, and the sooner we shall have a chance of getting out to Italy again."

This was true enough, and when on the fourth day they all found themselves on shipboard, and heard the sound of English voices, not one of them was there who did not feel for a moment the intensest pleasure and gratitude.

Hollydale, the old home, as Jack called it, was lying warm and pleasant in the bright afternoon's sun, as Jack and his two friends neared it.

Ben Brace had wanted to fly off elsewhere, and said something about poking his nose in where he wasn't wanted, and so forth.

But Jack wouldn't listen to him.

"You can go to Jericho afterwards if you like," he said; "but now you're under sailing orders for Hollydale, and you must come. I want my father and mother to see one that's been so good to me."

"Well, well, you're in command, and I must obey," said Ben Brace. "So heave ahead."

So it came to pass that Jack and his friends walked up the lane together towards Hollydale on that warm and sleepy afternoon.

"Dash my buttons!" cried Tom, whose face was radiant with delight—he had no heart-sorrow to make him sad—"the old place looks for all the world just as if we'd left it yesterday. It hasn't changed a bit."

"Why should it, after so short a time?" asked Jack. "See, there's the old farm, Tom's home," he added, pointing out to Ben a pleasant homestead, nestling down in a little valley not far from the high-road, "and there," pointing to a comfortable red-brick house at the summit of the hill, "there's my father's place."

Both his father and mother were ready at the door to meet them, for they recognized Jack from the window as he came running up the hill, followed by his two friends.

Such a meeting it was!

They had given him up for lost until the letter which he had sent them post haste when he reached Southampton.

And they wept tears of joy now over the reunion.

Tom, of course, slunk off soon, in order to hurry to the farm, and Ben remained with Jack. What an evening they had!

The old sailor declared that he had never spent such a one in the whole course of his life.

Ben went away next day to see his friends in London, with a promise to return in a week; and Jack, who had, of course, to report himself at head-quarters, went with him.

The news he brought back with him to his parents was happy in one way, although in another way it was sad, for it told of a speedy separation.

How the record of his courage and his general behavior had reached the Admiralty he knew not, nor would they enlighten him.

Lord Howe simply said:

"Never mind, Mr. Gale. It is sufficient that we know all about it, and that in consequence of what we have heard you are promoted to the rank of lieutenant."

Jack could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

He, not yet eighteen, a lieutenant!

It seemed impossible.

But another and greater surprise was in store for him.

There were two ships between which he was given his choice.

One of which was going to sail to America and the other, the *Tormentor*, which was to go out at once to the Mediterranean.

He caught eagerly at this, and asked to be allowed to take Ben Brace and Tom Meadows with him.

The captain, a thorough-going old sailor called Halstead, at once assented, and in the course of a fortnight Jack had taken leave of his father and mother, and was on board the handsome frigate *Tormentor*, en route for the Mediterranean, in search of glory and Emily, of whose fate he had heard nothing, although he had sent Leonardo to her with his address in England.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A BRILLIANT sunset, long yellow streaks of gold flickering on the rolling waves.

The frigate was flying the British flag.

Its crew was busy holystoning the deck or cleaning the guns, or repairing some defect in the rigging—every one, in fact, seeing that the vessel was "ship-shape and trim."

The captain and the first "luff" were conversing eagerly on the quarter-deck, and Jack Gale and Ben Brace were talking, perhaps a little under breath, near the binnacle.

"Beg your honor's pardon," began Ben, after a moment.

Jack was gazing anxiously on the other side of the vessel.

"What did you say, Ben?" said Jack, as he turned familiarly to the old sailor. "I thought you understood that all that kind of formality was disposed of long ago."

"Can't help it; it's natural-like, sir," said old Ben, "specially now as you are second 'luff.'"

But what I was a-going to say, sir, was this: it seems as if we were never a-going to land, and I know as it's the land as yer honor's a-hankering for."

"Well, you're right there, Ben," said Jack, with a sad smile; "it is the land I long for, for what can I learn out here on the sea, idling the time away? While I think—I dream of nothing but of those whom I left helpless at the mercy of Ralph Howard. I wish to get to Reggio and Genoa. There at least I may have a chance of discovering some clew to them. But waiting here, dawdling about for wind that will not come, and enemies who keep out of the way, doesn't suit me, Ben, I can tell you."

"No," said Ben, smiling and shaking his head dubiously, "I don't suppose it do, sir. But here's a boat coming towards us. She's a-pulling hard from shore. Hurrah! she's got dispatches aboard, no doubt, and perhaps we shall have hot work after all."

Jack smiled.

"Well, he said, 'I suppose it would be better to be in the middle of it again than to loaf around shore like this. What's it mean? The officer in the stern sheets looks like an Englishman.'"

"Yes, and the flag they're flying's English, too," said Ben. "What's up, I wonder?"

Every one on board the *Tormentor* was eager to learn what was the cause of the visit of the boat, and from all parts of the rigging and the sides of the vessel they anxiously watched the approach of the new-comer.

As the boat drew nearer it was easy to see that Jack was right, and that the officer in the stern sheets was an Englishman.

"Can I come aboard?" he bawled out through a speaking-trumpet as he came nearer.

"Ay, ay, come aboard," cried Captain Halstead.

And in a few minutes the boat had been fixed on to the chains, and the officer had scrambled up.

He was a military officer, a captain of dragoons, and it appeared that he had been sent from the main body of the English army to reconnoiter in the neighborhood of Zerbona, a village which lay about a mile inland.

No enemy, at any rate in force, had been expected to meet them on the way, but after passing the village and nearing the ruins, they saw that they had been gradually surrounded.

He had about a hundred men with him, only fifty of them being Italians, and those who were so gradually drawing a cordon round him numbered quite a thousand.

He had barricaded himself and his men in the ruin of an old abbey, and hoped to be able to hold out until aid came, but when they saw the *Tormentor* anchored in the bay, and the British flag flying, they had made a resolve to try a sortie to the shore.

They had discovered in the basement of the old abbey a subterranean passage, which they had followed with some difficulty, and which they found led out upon the beach, at some distance from the point where the *Tormentor* lay at anchor.

"And what do you wish me to do?" asked Captain Halstead.

"Well," replied Captain Cameron, "I wish you would lend me some men to force my way through the enemy, or carry us all along the coast to Benevento, and so enable me to make my way through the woods to my general's line of march."

"You can have the aid of my marines and my blue jackets with pleasure, captain," said Halstead. "I must keep enough on board to see to the vessel, and to look out, for I am here on the watch for a French cruiser, the *Achille*, but I think I can muster for you at least eighty men. Surely with a hundred and eighty men we can do something against these vagabonds. But as to one thing I am at a loss."

"What is that?" asked Cameron.

"Why do these men annoy you thus? What is the reason they are antagonistic to you when we are fighting for their interests?"

Cameron smiled.

"These fellows," he said, "who are opposed to me are not the Italians for whose benefit our brave men are wasting their lives. They are the scum of Italy—the brigands who hide about in the mountains, and infest the woods for the sake of robbing and murdering every one they come near. My hundred reinforced by eighty more Englishmen will disperse them to the winds. There is a splendid point for a charge if we can only coax them out into the plain below."

"Very well," said Halstead, with a smile, "I'll just show you what kind of chaps I've got to lend ye. I, of course, shall come with them. Bosun, pipe all hands on deck."

Jack, close at hand, was watching all these proceedings with interest.

He heard every word of what passed between the

two captains, and knew, of course, that he would be one of the party.

All hands were in a few minutes on deck. The captain at once addressed them, asking which of them would volunteer to go.

The answer was an eager and unanimous demand to go.

Every man pressed forward with eager face.

"You see," said Halstead, as he turned to Cameron, "you won't have half-hearted men with you. You must draw lots, my brave fellows. I must have eight left on board here."

And so it was done.

The drawing of lots did not occupy many minutes, and within an extraordinary short space of time the boats were lowered and the sailors and marines were soon being taken ashore.

Once on the beach, the boats were fastened together, and left in the charge of two sailors, and then, under the guidance of Captain Cameron, they were making their way towards the entrance to the subway of the old monastery ruins.

It was soon reached.

It was an opening in a mass of shubbery, so that it was impossible to see any trace of it from the high road.

Yet Captain Cameron found it easily.

It was terribly dark and somber as they passed in, but in a few moments a long whistle from the captain caused a number of torches to blaze forth suddenly some distance off.

They marched swiftly along the dimly-lighted passage, and it was not long before they once more emerged into the bright light of day.

Here they found themselves in a most romantic spot.

The monastery had, in fact, been built on a high hill, and had in years gone by been a well-known landmark.

The English were at once distinguishable by their red coats; the others, in spite of their belonging to the regular Italian army, were a sadly nondescript lot.

"You see now why I wanted your aid, Captain Halstead," said Cameron, as his men sprang to their feet and indulged in a loud British cheer, which echoed merrily down the hillside. "How could I depend upon such a set as that?"

"Well, they certainly do not look much by the side of our fellows," said the captain.

"What news, Battisto?" asked Cameron.

The words were addressed to a tall Italian, who was somewhat better dressed than the others—a fellow who looked much more intelligent also.

"The last news, signor," he said, "was that the enemy were closing in upon us on all sides. A battle is imminent."

"So you see, Captain Halstead," he added, with a smile, "there's nothing for it but a fight. I haven't had a chance of showing what metal I am made of until now. My hundred men were certainly not equal to the task of opposing and defeating a thousand brigands. So you must forgive me if I eagerly caught at the chance of help when I saw your flag flying."

"I don't blame you," said Halstead. "But at what point do you expect the attack?"

"I am informed by my spies," said Cameron, "that the men will gather below in the valley yonder, with a piece of ordnance, and endeavor to blow us out of our position. I have here, you see, fifty mounted men, fifty Italians on foot, and your marines and blue jackets. What I propose is that we shall send fifty men to yonder wood, and let them place themselves in ambush. With the fifty horse I will charge down the hill, and while the enemy are in confusion your eighty fellows can descend the hill at a run, covered by the fire of the ambuscade. Just beyond is a strong fort. That fort it is my purpose to seize and hold until General Crawford chooses to send me reinforcements. If he does not we will die like brave soldiers."

All arrangements having been made, Captain Halstead and Captain Cameron stood on the top of a ruined part of the wall to reconnoiter.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BATTLE—JACK'S PRIZES.

"WE'RE in for a new kind of game," said Ben Brace to Tom Meadows, while they were waiting, musket in hand, for the order to charge down the hill.

"Yes," said Tom, "but it's better than rolling about a mile off shore doing nothing. See! yonder they come."

"Yes, I see them," said Ben. "Now they're getting ready the cannon and taking aim. Ah! here it comes."

The gunner had pointed his weapon in a great hurry, and the iron messenger of death went whistling by, far above their heads.

At the same time, as if the firing of the gun had

been a signal, other parties of armed men came creeping up on the other side.

The fifty men who had proceeded to form the ambush, had reached their destination unnoticed, and Captain Cameron lost no time in giving the orders for the advance.

At a quick run, the two detachments of marines and sailors began the descent of the hill, one on the left and the other on the right, leaving a wide space for the advance of the cavalry.

When they had reached half-way down the incline they fired into the midst of their enemies, and then dashed down with fixed bayonets.

As they did so the earth fairly shook beneath them, as the fifty horsemen came rushing down the slope, the dear old flag waving in the breeze, the sun glinting on the bright helmets and cuirasses, and the blades of the drawn swords.

The enemy were, as it seemed, confounded by the daring of the little band.

The rush was terrific.

The incline was steep and long; the leaders recklessly brave; the men resolute; the horse heavy and well trained.

They went crashing into the midst of the enemy.

There was a momentary lull then.

The horses had to force their way through a heavy mass of men, and they were being assailed on all sides, when crack, crack, crack went the muskets of the ambuscade, and the two bodies of marines and sailors went pell-mell into the huddling ranks of the foe with fixed bayonets.

The disposition of the little force was so good that it took the Italians quite by surprise, and in a few moments all was confusion.

From the ambush the muskets were ringing out, the cavalry were using their swords with a fierce good will, while the sailors and marines, some with their muskets slung, and using cutlass and pistol, others with their bayonets, were dealing death everywhere.

Presently the little body of horse, with only the loss of four men, struggled its way out of the mass, and, quickly reforming, charged back.

The ambush now became livelier than ever, and the half-disciplined bandits and other scum of the mountainous regions, broken up into groups, with no one to give orders, at length broke and fled.

The cannon was turned against them, and a rain of musketry gave increased speed to their legs.

The picturesquely-dressed bodies of the brigands and French stragglers lay in every direction where they had been cut down by the brave little band.

"Well, I think that has been a most brilliant little affair," said Halstead.

"Yes," replied Cameron, "thanks to the courage and devotion of your men, and the brilliant services of Lieutenants Brodrick and Gale. I must personally thank them. I only wish that they were not in the naval service. I would undertake to place them soon in a high position in the army."

Having spoken to the first "luff," he hastened across to the spot where Jack stood with his men in as good order, and looking as trim (except for their flushed faces) as if they were only just preparing for battle, and surrounding a batch of Italian prisoners whom they had taken.

Cameron bent down from his horse, and holding out his hand, shook that of Jack warmly, and said:

"Lieutenant Gale, you are a credit to your profession. I myself was witness to your capture of two prisoners, and your dragging them along with one hand while you fought with the other. It shall not fail to be reported to head-quarters."

"I am very glad you are pleased with my behavior. My men were at their best."

"Yes; they were brave as lions," said Cameron, as he scanned the field with his glass. "And now we had better make the best of our way to the fortress yonder."

The gates of the fortress were closed as they neared it, and one or two men could be seen on the battlements armed with muskets.

But Cameron took no heed of this.

He ordered the trumpets to sound; demanded a surrender in Italian; and, failing an immediate reply, he had the gun brought up and gunner ready to blow the gate open.

This resolution had the desired effect.

The gates were in a few minutes thrown open; the victorious little band marched in; the British ensign was raised instead of the Italian and French flags, which were hauled down.

Sentinels having been posted on the battlements, the rest of the force set itself to work to devour a good meal.

Jack during the repast was all impatience.

Ben observed it.

"Don't seem to be enjoying yourself much, Master Jack?" he said.

"No; I'm all in a hurry to get away."

"Where to?"

"To the prisoners' rooms."

"Why, sir?"

"Didn't you see that lad I took prisoner?"

"Yes, sir, I did," said Ben Brace. "He was a handsome lad; so clear-featured, and such a beautiful face you'd almost take him for a girl."

"Yes, that's the one," said Jack. "I've looked into his face, and I see a most mysterious likeness to some one whom I'm in search of."

"To one of them vagabond pirates?"

"Yes; either to Leoni or to some one I have seen with him," said Jack. "You have no idea how it has worried me, because I cannot tell where I have seen him. I am afraid to speak too plainly, for fear of putting him on his guard."

"How about the *Tormentor*, sir?"

"I don't know. I'm under orders here," said Jack; "but if I were Captain Halstead I shouldn't like to leave the ship by itself so long on an enemy's coast with only a handful of men aboard."

"But supposing it is not an enemy's coast?" said a voice near him.

Jack started.

It was the voice of Captain Halstead.

"I beg your pardon, sir—I—" stammered Jack.

"Don't apologize, Mr. Gale," said Captain Halstead; "I'm not one of those men who mind being criticised. No doubt I have left the ship with very few men aboard, but I don't anticipate we shall have any enemies down upon us. The Italians are supposed to be our allies. But I have work cut out for some one."

"Indeed, captain," said Jack; "may I ask what it is?"

"Yes; to run the gauntlet of these Italian brigands," said Halstead. "To take two men with him, and a dispatch to Lieutenant Cosgrove."

"And who is the favored officer?"

"The favored one!" exclaimed Halstead. "I do not see that there is any great favor in it. It is a perilous adventure altogether."

"But may I not know the name of the officer?" cried Jack again, his heart throbbing with eager hope.

"Yes—it is yourself."

There was no mistaking the genuine pleasure with which our hero heard this news.

A flush overspread his cheek, and he said, quickly:

"Oh, thank you, captain! I am glad you trust me."

"I could not trust a braver fellow," said Halstead. "When I intrust this duty to you, I know it will be done properly. At the mid-watch all will be ready."

"I shall be ready, sir," said Jack.

And in a short time Jack made his way to the room where the prisoners were, and where he at once singled out the young captive he had himself taken that day.

He was apparently about seventeen years of age.

His face was excessively handsome, and his form was so lithe, and active, and graceful that it seemed almost the form of a woman.

"What is your name?" said Jack, in Italian.

"Juan."

"Juan! What else?"

"Juan Castello," replied the lad quickly.

"Come on the ramparts with me," said Jack; "I have something of importance to tell you."

The boy's eyes sparkled with joy.

The ramparts meant freedom, for beneath them was the soft green turf, and he could chance a leap.

"The signor commands, I obey," he said.

In a few moments they stood out on the ramparts away from observation.

The evening had now merged into night.

The boy measured the height with his eyes from the ramparts to the ground.

Jack saw his actions, and understood their meaning at once.

"Come, come, Juan," he said; "it is of no use for you to dream of escape. I have and shall keep a watchful eye over you, for you are a friend of Leoni the pirate."

CHAPTER XL.

A DISCOVERY—ALL IS FAIR IN LOVE AND WAR.

As Jack mentioned the name of Leoni, he caught Juan by the hand, and doing so felt the thrill of emotion which passed through the form of his hearer.

But in a moment the lad recovered his presence of mind.

"What do you mean by escape, signor?" he asked.

"You were thinking of escape," said Jack; "when you came up you were measuring with your eye the distance from the walls to the ground. But I am here, and if you jumped, a bullet from my pistol would be through you ere you reached the turf."

"What want you with me?" said the lad.

"I want to enable you to escape," said Jack; "but in order to do so, you must tell me the truth."

"Good; question me," said the boy.

"Do you not know Leoni the pirate?"

"Yes; but what is he to you?"

"My deadliest foe—one whose crimes I have seen, one who has again and again tried to compass my death, and separate me from one I loved. He is a scoundrel for whom hanging is too good."

The arm he still held trembled violently.

"You are hard upon him," said Juan.

"Hard upon him!" cried Jack passionately. "I would shoot him like a dog if I could only find him. But knowing Leoni you also know Bernardo, who was once his lieutenant."

"Yes," exclaimed Juan passionately, "I do know him! Once he —"

Then he stopped.

Evidently he was about to make a confession; and at the last moment he drew himself up.

"Once he loved you, you were going to say," answered Jack, as he slid his arm round the speaker's waist, "for I have discovered your secret—you are a woman."

Juanita, as we must now call her, started with fear.

Her first impulse was to demand that he should withdraw his arm.

Her second was precisely the opposite.

"Ha!" she thought, "I am beautiful—I will make him love me. I can so gain my freedom, and be in time to tell my friends that an enemy is on the way."

Beautiful traitress!

She knew not that in one so young as Jack she had her match.

She hung her head. But she did not move from his side though his arm was round her.

"How did you discover me?" she said, in a low tremulous tone.

"I remember you in the cave in the mountains near Reggio," said Jack. "What brings you hither?"

And Jack looked her in the eyes as she recoiled with a start.

Juanita laid her hand on Jack's arm, saying:

"I came to seek my faithless Bernardo."

Bernardo here! What could this mean?

"Let us sit down here, Juanita," said Jack, "on this seat, where we shall not be overheard."

As he sat down he had his arm round her waist still.

"All is fair in love and war," thought he. "I must be deceitful to save those whom I love."

"Have you seen Bernardo lately?" he asked.

"No, *Santa Maria!*" cried the girl, vengefully; "it is as well for him that I have not seen him, or my dagger might have been buried in his heart. Some one told me he had joined the French and come hither, and so I lost no time in following him, as I thought."

"You have failed?"

"Yes. I can find no trace of him."

"You wish now to go home?"

"Yes," said the disguised girl; "but how? I am a prisoner, and it is your interest to keep me so."

There was no possible reason why this girl should be kept a prisoner.

"Well," he said, "I must see how your release can be effected. When you return to Reggio shall you still pursue your search for the faithless Bernardo?"

"No," replied the girl. "If I come across his path I may speak to him in such a way that he will be sorry he ever was born. But, tell me, when did you see him last?"

"I will tell you. In fact, it may be as well for you to listen to my story altogether."

Carefully he told the narrative of his adventures and sufferings since the time when he first went on shore at Reggio in search of Emily and Lydia with the unfortunate Ernest Harden.

A deep sigh escaped Jack's breast as he finished his story.

Juanita observed it.

"Signor," she said, sharply, casting her brilliant eyes up at him just where the bright moonlight fell full upon them, and made them blaze like stars, "kiss me."

The demand was certainly a strange one.

But Juanita was very beautiful, and what sailor ever refused to worship at the shrine of beauty?

He bent and kissed her.

"Now, then," she said, "I will trust you not to deceive me. I know—or at least I have been

told—that no Englishman would ever betray a woman whom he had kissed. But I will begin by telling you that you have deceived me."

"Deceived you!" exclaimed Jack. "How so?"

"Yes," and the little face was turned up bewitchingly towards him, "you tried to make me believe that the friends you are so anxious to save were English signors. They were not. Your sigh betrayed you. They were ladies."

Jack laughed; but he made no reply.

He was no match against woman's cunning.

"Ah, you see, I have found you out," she went on. "You could not deceive me. You thought that my vanity would be in the way; that if I imagined that you were seeking one you loved, I would not help you. Ah, how wrong you are. I know what it is to have loved and been deceived, and that will make me aid you all the more. Tell me, in what way can I serve you?"

At this moment a tall figure loomed up before them.

"Is that you, Lieutenant Gale?" said a stern voice.

"I am here," cried Jack, rising.

"Is it true that you have one of the prisoners with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is very strange conduct," said his commanding officer. "I hope it admits of a thorough explanation."

"It does, sir," said Jack, eagerly, "in every way. If you can spare me a few moments I will explain everything."

"Speak then, and quickly," said Captain Halstead, "for I can give but little time."

Jack briefly told all.

The captain quietly took his hand and pressed it.

"I am sorry for my momentary mistrust," he said, "but you know what discipline is, Mr. Gale, and we must not allow it to be subverted for a moment. What do you want to do with her?"

"It would be best to take her on board and land her at Reggio when our ship touches there," said Jack, "for she may be the means of my finding my friends, or, at least, some account as to their loss."

"Yes, certainly; but be prepared for your journey," said Halstead. "Which two men will you take with you?"

"Ben Brace and Tom Meadows, if I can, sir."

"All right," said his commander, with a smile, "you'll do best if you have your chums at your side. Now get rid of your little signorita there, and come to my room. In a quarter of an hour will do."

With this he turned away, and Jack returned to Juanita.

"Well?" she said, anxiously. "He was angry. What is the matter?"

"He misconstrued my actions for a moment, but all is well now," said Jack. "I will tell you what I propose that you shall do. I will obtain your release at once. You will be free to go whither you will; but I shall ask you to come in our ship to Reggio. There you will be able to do me a great service."

"I am at your disposal," said Juanita; "and since Bernardo is not here, or likely to be here, I hope you sail soon."

"I hope so, too," said Jack, "but I do not know when we set sail. In that the captain has not made me his confidant. But I must see you back to your room now, Juanita. I and two companions are going to ride across the plain and over the hills to the coast to-night, at midnight, to take a dispatch to the officer in charge of the vessel."

Juanita grasped his arm.

"Are you mad?" she cried.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, your life wouldn't be worth a moment's purchase," she cried. "There will be marksmen hidden behind every bush. No, no, you must not go, unless indeed I go with you."

"Go with me!" exclaimed Jack, a shade of suspicion crossing his mind for the first time.

"What for?"

"Excuse me," said Juanita, "do not be offended, but your Italian is not so good as mine. I am a native, and you are not. Let a woman's wit save you this time. You have many prisoners; put on their costumes. I will accompany you dressed as I am. In the moonlight they will see that you wear an Italian dress, and they will demand the watchword. I know it. I will speak, and you can pass in safety."

Jack hesitated a moment.

No wonder was it; he had been so often deceived.

"Ah," she said, in a sad tone, "you mistrust me. Never mind, I will give you the watchword, and you can take your chance. Ah, why cannot you trust me? I offer to share your peril, and yet you do not believe me."

Jack could withstand her no longer.

"Yes, I believe you," he said. "I will consult the captain. I think your plan is an excellent one. Will you come to your room now?"

"Ah," she said, laughing lightly, "I forgot that I was a prisoner."

"Would you rather remain up here, then?" asked Jack.

"Yes, if you can trust me."

Jack was not "all trust."

As I have said before, he had been so deceived and betrayed, that he dared not yield to any spirit of confidence.

It would be possible, if not with safety, at any rate with a chance of safety, to drop from the walls upon the soft and spongy turf.

Yet what did it matter?

If she did escape, could she do much harm to them?

These were his first thoughts.

But discipline came to his aid.

"Juanita," he said, "I cannot permit you to remain here without the permission of my superior officer. Come with me, and I will take you to him."

The young girl rose.

"Never mind," she said, "if it will make such a fuss as that. I shall be free enough soon."

And so for the moment Juanita went back to the prisoners' room, while Jack sought Captain Halstead.

The officer was with Cameron, and both expressed approval of the proposition made by the young girl.

The orders were already out, and the hour was eleven.

"Had I not better prepare to start at once?" said Jack.

"Make whatever preparations you like now," said Halstead, "you have to see your companions, arrange with them as to the transfer of the dresses and so forth. So you have not much time before you."

Within a few minutes everything was ready for a start.

Ben and Tom at once volunteered, and the despatch having been stowed away safely in Jack's pocket, the horses were brought, and the four riders emerged into the dark shadow of the wall.

Then after one glance round they started on their journey.

CHAPTER XLI.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

WHEN Jack had been up on the battlements with Juanita, he had taken observations of the country through which he would have to make his short but perilous ride.

To ascend the hill opposite would have been madness, as they would immediately become conspicuous objects.

To the left, however, after crossing the plain was a wide road winding right down to the beach.

So it was resolved to make a dash for it and trust to the speed of their horses.

It was arranged between Jack and Juanita, that they were to be supposed to be carrying despatches from the French to a gunboat, which was to be off shore at midnight.

On the ramparts, Cameron and Halstead watched eagerly.

It was a splendid night.

In front of the fort, where the adventurers had gone, was the tall green hill surmounted by trees; the plain below; the misty heather-land to their left, through which the white road meandered, while the old ruin, weird and grand in the ghostly light, was the grim sentinel over all.

"All seems quiet," said Cameron.

"Yes," said Halstead. "I hope they'll do it."

"If it were only for the sake of that brave lad, Jack Gale, I wish the same," said Cameron; "he's a promising young officer."

"One of the best, if not the best, in the service for his age," said Halstead; "he's a mere strippling, and yet he has the thought and the courage of a man."

"Yes, a true young hero," replied Cameron.

"But hark! What was that?"

"It was a shot!"

Both listened eagerly.

Shot after shot now came distinctly on the night air.

Then all was still, though with their nerves strung to their utmost tension, they could almost fancy, in the wondrous silence, that they could distinguish the shriek of a human being in agony.

"By Heaven! If I thought those four brave ones were in peril, I should feel inclined to turn out all the horsemen and make a sortie to save

them," cried Cameron in agitation. "Why should they suffer for me?"

"Stay! be not hasty," said Halstead, "if you were to send your men out now, you would defeat the object for which brave lives have been lost. You asked my help in order that you might reach this fort. To make a sortie now, especially if you left the fort so far behind you, would give you all the work to do over again. No, no, Cameron, much as I respect and love young Gale, he must chance the fortunes of war like others."

Meanwhile Jack and his friends had rushed away at once at full speed.

If any enemies were lurking about the fort they must have been completely taken by surprise.

There was no chance of doing anything.

The little forlorn hope as we may call it had come they knew not whence, and darted by them like the wind.

Away—away over the heather.

As yet untouched.

Away then along the white and chalky road.

No one seemed in sight.

All was supremely still.

In the bright moonlight it seemed certain that they would be able to see every object.

Yet not a vestige of anything human was perceivable.

Everything was gorse and heather and long grass.

A monotonous expanse of silence.

Behind were the bright lights of the fort, in front the great ocean rolling in its foam-crested waves, and the *Tormentor* tossing to and fro at anchor, with its red and blue lanterns rising and falling with every rush of the tide.

Up to this point, where all seemed clear to the beach, not a word had been spoken by any of the party.

It had all been hard and desperate riding.

Now Juanita spoke.

"We have escaped them, I hope," she said, in a voice of pleased surprise.

"It seems so, indeed," said Jack. "There is only one more ugly point to pass, that heath-covered mass of bowlders, and then we have but a helter-skelter ride for the beach."

As if to show how wrong they were, a volley at this moment rattled in among them.

It did no harm as it happened.

It only showed them that enemies were near at hand.

In an instant their pistols were in their hands, but speed was never slackened.

In fact, Jack cried out—

"Ride faster, friends! Don't spare the horses, if we can only reach the beach!"

As they reached the two piles of bowlders—huge piles, be it said, placed there artificially to mark the entrance of the road—about ten of the enemy sprang from behind the shadows, waving swords.

No slackening speed here!

The four raised their pistols, firing as they dashed on furiously, and then charging with swords.

The effect was tremendous.

The riders came on the foe four abreast, and the twenty Italians were scattered here and there.

"Fools! idiots!" shouted Juanita, in the ringing accents of her native tongue, adopting a hoarser voice on purpose. "Why do you oppose us? We are from General Campo. We are on an errand of life and death. Are you all blind?"

This was cried out in the momentary pause caused by the charge.

The brigands stood still for a moment, hesitatingly.

"If you are from General Campo," said one, "why did you fire on us?—and what is the watchword?"

"Why did we fire on you?" cried Juanita, with a laugh of derision. "Are we nice that we are to say thank you for a volley of musket bullets, when we know the fort is held by the English, and we wished to fly to the beach to meet the boats of the gun-boat *Roman King*? *Basta!*"

"But the watchword?"

"From France to Italy."

"Good. You can go on," said the man.

"And thank your lucky star," said Juanita, pointing to the wounded brigands who lay upon the chalky ground, "that you have not wounded one of us. Vengeance would not have waited long, for two of my companions are French officers in disguise. *Buono notte!*" Then she added—"*En avance, Messieurs les Francais.*"

These last words were addressed to Jack, who, as she was well aware, understood French though his companions did not.

In an instant they were once more en route for

the beach, those of the brigands who had not been wounded being close behind them.

On reaching the shore Jack fired his pistol three times in succession, which was a signal long before agreed upon.

Then, as a boat came slowly and cautiously towards the shore, he shouted:

"*Tormentor* ahoy!"

"Ay, ay!" was the answer.

And the boat began pulling towards the shore, followed by one who was further out at sea.

This was the critical moment.

The four rode their horses far out into the water—as far as the animals could go with safety.

Then they waited.

The brigands by these means were able to catch them up, as the boat was some distance from the shore, and it took time to bring it up safely in the rough sea.

They waded out into the surf.

"Where is the gun-boat?" cried one.

"Yonder," exclaimed Juanita, pointing far out to sea, where a mist lay upon the waters.

"Where? I can see nothing," said the man, edging closer.

"I am not here to cure blind men," said the disguised girl, angrily, speaking in her own voice.

"Ha! Juanita! she is false to us!" exclaimed he, aiming a blow at her. "At them, comrades; we are betrayed!"

He never had a chance of saying more in this world.

Jack's sword flashed through his breast, while the stentorian voice of Ben Brace roared out:

"*Tormentors*, ahoy there! Hurry up this way!"

The men, in very truth, did not want much urging.

They bent cheerily to their oars, and while a strange battle was being waged in the water, they came up with a rush.

In an instant Jack and his friends had leaped in.

The horses were whipped in among the men, who were attacking the four as they stood amid the surf, and the boat was instantly turned towards the ship.

But at a signal, other brigands had now begun to rush to the scene of action, and hoping now that the reinforcements would arrive in time to turn the tables, they clutched desperately the gunwale of the boat.

But it was no use.

The sailors had not come unprovided, and a few blows of an ax settled this new phase of the question.

Then they settled to their oars, while the four fugitives, seizing the muskets, which were all ready in the boat, poured a volley into the crowding men.

This had the desired effect.

The brigands drew back, and the boat with a few vigorous pulls was dragged out of reach.

This was the work only of a few moments, but deadly execution had been done.

Not one of the four had spoken of a wound while the battle waged.

But now the danger was over, Juanita cried—"Help me, signor!" and fell fainting in Jack's arms, pressing at the same time her hand over her breast.

"Good Heavens! she has fainted," exclaimed our hero. "Has any of you a flask of any thing?"

"Ay, here be a flask o' rum, sir," cried one of the boat's crew; "and by your leave, sir, when the lady has drank, will ye pass it round? for here's Tom Meadows shot through the arm, and Ben Brace here is making faces as if he'd been sitting in a red-hot frying-pan."

"Which it wasn't through running away," growled Ben Brace, "but I've got it rather hot behind me."

By the time they reached the ship's side, the eyes of Juanita opened, and fell on Jack with a loving expression.

"Signor Inglese," she murmured.

"Yes, Juanita."

"I am so happy."

"Why?"

"Because you are safe," murmured she again, in the musical language which rippled so pleasantly from her lips.

"I do not think I shall ever be better. My wound is through my chest, which tells me not to hope, for there is a heart weariness that seems to warn me all is over."

"I hope not," cried Jack. "I hate those pirates and brigands enough now. Do not make me dislike them more, or you will turn me into a very demon."

They had reached the ship now.

Behind them a mass of Italians were still crowded on the beach, firing away uselessly though determinedly at the boat.

Our heroes were soon hauled up on board.

Once there and the explanation given, the guns of the *Tormentor* were turned upon the mass of men, who, after the first surprise, fled helter-skelter under cover.

The orders in the dispatch were very precise.

The *Tormentor* was to sail at once for Benvenuto.

There Jack was to land and take a dispatch to General Crawford.

Then, if possible, he was to come back with the reinforcements on board the *Tormentor*.

This was very easily put on paper, but not so easily performed.

However, Jack did not hesitate.

In fact he was not one who ever demurred at anything.

His care during the journey was Juanita, who, attended by the ship's surgeon, soon began to show signs of recovery.

By the time the vessel arrived off the port all were fairly well.

But Lieutenant Herbert would not dream of Jack's going with only his three friends.

Six more sailors were told off, and Juanita, though pale and still weak, insisted upon being one of the party.

It was on a fine morning that they landed in the town.

By Juanita's directions their first visit was to a wineshop.

"There you will no doubt see familiar faces," she said.

And he did.

Two villainous faces they were, dark, scowling, surrounded by lank black hair.

He knew them, in fact, at once.

They were two of Howard's band, his intimates, and where these were it was natural to suppose that the head villain would be also.

He was on the track of his dear Emily, her sister, and the pirate once more!

CHAPTER XLII.

RETROSPECTION—A NEW FRIENDSHIP AND AN OLD FOE—FRESH DANGER.

In order fully to understand the position of Jack and his companions, we must go back to the time when Lydia and Emily were so unexpectedly left in the power of Ralph Howard the pirate.

It was to the surprise of every one that Jack and the others did not make their reappearance on the evening after they had been supposed to go out to the *Thunder* and back.

Ralph, who anticipated his coming on board to and in making arrangements for their approaching voyage to England, was utterly bewildered when, on going ashore again, he found that the young lieutenant and his friends had started and not returned.

"They cannot have missed my vessel," he said to the two dismayed girls, who of course expected Jack to return with him. "Mine is the only one lying in the offing, with the exception of some beggarly Frenchmen."

The girls eyed one another in a questioning way.

Then the light of suspicion was in their orbs, as they turned them upon the pirate.

"You are sure there has been no foul play?" said Lydia.

The deep flush of indignation spread itself over the face of the English buccaneer.

This accusation was terribly mortifying to his pride.

He had hoped that he had created a favorable impression on the mind of Lydia, that he was, in fact, laying the foundation of his fond hopes; and yet she seemed ready to believe that he was capable even of murder to remove from his path the persons who might be in his way.

"I hope I do not interpret your looks aright," he said. "They would tell me that you fancy I would do any injury to your friends, whereas I—my heart tells me that the interest of your friends is mine also."

Lydia wrung her hands piteously.

"How can we think so?" she cried. "How can we believe in anything or anybody? We have led the life of wanderers upon the face of the earth for many a long day. We have been driven hither and thither over land and sea, first in the power of one, then in the power of another, and then at last, when there was a chance of escape, we find ourselves again helpless, in the hands of a stranger, and our best friends gone, Heaven knows where!"

"Well, well," said Howard, stifling by a great effort the passionate urgings of his heart. "They may turn up presently, none the worse for the delay."

"I fear not," said Lydia.

Emily did not speak. Her heart was too full. Poor, dear Jack!

Everything had been progressing so well and so smoothly that it seemed hard to think that the even tenor was again to be disturbed, and that they were again not only to be separated, but plunged into a vortex of misery and despair.

"You make the worst of everything," said Howard. "Who knows what adventures they may have been led into? There are a hundred ways in which a young sailor and his comrades may be waylaid in a pleasurable way. Pray do not be disconsolate, and pray also believe that I am your best friend."

The two girls were silent. Their breasts were torn by conflicting emotions. They were in the power of this man. Of this there could be no doubt.

They also owed to him a great deal, since he had again and again risked his life to release them from the power of Leoni.

And yet? Was not his purpose known to them? Did he not love Lydia? Was not his passion all the stronger for her because it was calmer?

The very fact of his courageous action on their behalf gave him a claim, at which Lydia shuddered.

At any rate, it would be folly to enrage him. The hours went by.

And still no sign came of those whom they were so eager to see.

They did not dream of retiring to slumber.

Late as was the hour, they remained up, waiting anxiously.

Ralph Howard joined them at supper—a meal which no one, not even the mighty pirate himself, enjoyed.

They began, in fact, to see now that he was intensely agitated and anxious.

Unreasonably, perhaps, he imagined that the presence of Jack would be beneficial to himself.

"This is becoming serious," said Howard, as the hands of the clock pointed to the hour of three. "I will go out and see if I can find them."

This was a new danger, as it were.

If any danger was floating about, it would affect Ralph Howard, as well as Jack and his companions.

They would be left alone in a foreign country, without money or friends, the only person they knew being their worst foe, Leoni, the pirate.

Emily placed her hand gently on his arm as he was about to go.

"Pray be careful, Mr. Howard," she said. "If Jack Gale and the others are in danger, so also are you, and if you do not come back, we are entirely at the mercy of our enemies."

That was a proud moment for Ralph the Avenger.

As he gazed down at the tender, pleading eyes of Emily, so innocent and yet so beautiful, he felt a new and happy feeling stirring in his breast.

This gentle being looked up to him for protection.

Was not this an approach to the position he was so earnestly seeking in regard to the two English girls?

"My dear young lady," he said, "do not be alarmed. As I said before, there are a hundred ways in which an English sailor may be kept from his friends. He might be inveigled into a gambling-house, or any place like that. So, as I have said, fear not for me. I will return if I be not killed. I know well what you mean. You fancy that Leoni or some of his band are prowling about. If they are, depend upon it I am not going alone, and I and my companions will be well armed."

And so he sallied forth.

Lydia turned to her sister with a sigh.

"Captain Howard is a strange man—a much more dangerous one than Leoni, in fact."

Emily shuddered.

"How can you say so?" she said. "Any one must be better than that brutal ruffian. If Ralph Howard had been born under a better star he would have been a gentleman."

"No doubt," said Lydia, "that is what I mean. He will be calm and deliberate, pleading and generous, and gentle, instead of rough and boisterous like Leoni. These characteristics make him for more difficult to spurn."

"Yet far less likely to put a stiletto into your bosom, which Leoni would delight in doing at any moment."

For a long time the two girls conversed, when at last tired nature asserted itself, and they lapsed into a deep sleep.

It was nearly ten in the morning when they awoke.

Ralph Howard was awaiting them, and they hastened to him at once.

He had news for them.

But very bad.

"I regret to say," said he, after the usual morning's greeting, "that I have a clew to your friends. But it affords us no means of saving them, or of even discovering what it all means."

"Pray, tell us," said Emily, with white lips, "anything must be better than suspense."

"Well, it seems," proceeded Howard, "that on reaching the harbor, the boat of the *Thunder* was not there, and fancying that some mistake had been made, they engaged a wherry belonging to a native fisherman, and pulled out towards the vessel."

"My men had shifted her quarters for purposes which it would be useless to describe to you, and so they pulled out to the only vessel in the offing, one that in most points resembled the *Thunder*, and could not be told from her in the dark."

"On board this vessel then they went, deceived by its outward appearance apparently, and by the voice of some one who spoke from the deck."

"What was the ship then?" asked Lydia.

"For Heaven's sake, do not say it was Leoni's."

"No," replied Howard, "Leoni has no ship at present. No, from what I can make out, the vessel which Jack Gale and the others boarded was called the *Vulture*."

"The *Vulture*? Jack's old vessel," cried Emily.

"Yes, the English prize captured by the French," said Lydia. "Then they must be prisoners?"

"That's just what it is," said Howard. "And they will be carried off to some outlandish spot where we shall be unlikely to hear any more of them until they are released."

"And then?"

"They will go straight to England," said Howard, "and so it will be best for us to go there too."

England!

This was indeed good news.

Yet, poor Ernest, Lydia's young husband.

Was it sure that he was dead?

"You inspire us with fresh hope," cried Lydia, "but are you sure that Ernest, my husband, is dead? If he is dead, then it would be useless for me to remain here; but if he still lives, it is my duty to stay on the chance of discovering him."

"There can, I think, be no doubt of his death," said Ralph. "I saw him stabbed and flung into the sea, and a blow from the right hand of Bernardo was no child's play, let me tell you. It is my advice to you both to go at once to England."

"And you, Mr. Howard?"

"I am going to start for England at once," he answered; "you can go there in my vessel."

The two girls made no reply.

This was not what they had bargained for.

And yet, without the aid of this man, how could they reach their native land?

"Yes," said Lydia, somewhat faintly, "I suppose that is our only resource."

Lydia had a knack of saying things which irritated Howard greatly.

He was keenly sensitive.

His semi-Italian nature made him suspicious as well as quickly alive to ridicule or insult, and the hot blood mounted again to his cheeks as he heard her reply to his words.

"Yes," he said, "that is your only resource. But before I go to make preparations for our departure, which can be very soon if all goes well, I wish to have a few minutes' private talk with you, Mrs. Harden."

Lydia turned pale.

Howard observed it and said haughtily:

"You have no reason to fear me. I think since the moment when you first met me I have behaved to you with all respect."

"Yes; but I cannot see that you have anything to say to me which cannot as well be said before my sister."

"You are wrong," said Howard; "however, I will not press it now. I am going to see if I can obtain any further information in regard to the *Vulture*, to find if possible the part it is bound for, in order to touch there when we voyage to England. We might—who knows?—rescue them."

"Then why not go at once?" cried Emily, impulsively. "Surely between this and the coast of France we should be likely to come across them."

Howard smiled.

"I will do my best to discover all I can. And to-night when I return we can have the conversation I desire, Mistress Harden; it is nothing to offend you."

"I guess what he desires to say, and I dread it," said Lydia, as the Avenger left them; "but I must be brave, and even in spite of the peril I place myself in, I will tell him how utterly loathsome his addresses are to me."

Emily said nothing.

To her younger spirit, so tried, so patient, words seemed to refuse to come.

"I shall pray Heaven in its mercy to take me if this continues much longer," thought Lydia; "such a life as this is not worth living."

She knew not that she was plunging, as it were, willfully right in the teeth of a new peril, more awful and disastrous still.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TWO INTERVIEWS—LYDIA MAKES A DEADLY FOE.

NINE o'clock brought Ralph Howard back. There was a change in him, which Lydia observed and regretted.

His face was flushed, his eyes had a certain wildness in them.

He had, in fact, been drinking.

This redoubtable hero, this man who could face without shrinking the bullets of the most daring foeman, who had never been cowed in battle, had never quailed in the presence of the doughtiest enemy, had had recourse to wine before he could have his interview with a weak and simple woman.

He was accompanied by Norman.

Of this latter personage neither Lydia nor Emily had seen much during the last few weeks.

He was as objectionable to Emily as Howard was to Lydia, and she had been rejoicing in her good fortune in being exempted from his society.

From the first moment she had seen him, he had pleaded his cause against Jack, in spite of ridicule, contempt and insult.

Lydia, of course, forebore to show openly her knowledge of Howard's undue excitement, and received him as usual.

"May I now crave, lady, the few minutes' conversation I desired?" he said.

"But our friends," said Lydia; "you do not speak of them?"

"I had forgotten. I have sought everywhere," he answered, "and all I can learn is that they went on board the *Vulture*, the vessel which they were allowed to leave a long time ago on parole, and that the ship sailed immediately afterwards for the coast of France. And now, sweet lady," he added, altering his tone, "may I beg of you to grant me the interview I seek? I expect a few friends here this night, and I wish to know my fate before they come."

Happy thought!

He expected friends; he was not quite sober now.

What would he be later on?

Would there not be a chance of escape?

She would be gracious far beyond his expectations.

And yet!

What did escape mean for her in such circumstances, in a strange land, without a friend?

"Yes," she said, rising, "come with me into the adjoining room. You can there explain to me what it is you desire."

He bowed, and bade her lead the way.

In a few moments they were alone together, and the pirate sat himself down by her side.

"Mistress Harden," he said, "I know that you express great fear of me. But I beg at any rate you will listen to me patiently for a few moments."

"Very well. I will do so."

"I have already told you of my earlier life, of the wife I loved, of the vengeful hate of Leoni, of my life-long vow of vengeance."

"Yes, I have heard all that," said Lydia, quietly.

"And you pitied me?"

"Yes."

"Well, since then I have sworn to abandon my career of revenge—I have resolved to give up my sea-roving. I have determined to quit my ship, and to settle down in England in some quiet spot, where no one will ever know who I am, or whence my riches came."

"You will never be happy."

"Yes, I hope to be," said Ralph Howard, in a voice which, in spite of his resolute character, fairly trembled. "I have even now despatched my second lieutenant, Hugh Brandon, to England, to see to the purchasing of an estate. And what do you think has caused all this?"

"I know not," said Lydia, with a faint smile, which, however, betrayed the inward working of her soul.

Again the blood went back icily to Ralph Howard's heart.

But in spite of all this disdain his love overcame all.

"You do know. It is for love of you, Lydia," he cried, passionately, "that I wish to give up my wild and roving life. Nay, hear me out. I am a wild sea-rover, that I admit. In these days of war, buccaneering is the trade of a gentleman. I am well—ay, nobly born. My ancestors, the Howards of Effingham, were buccaneers, yet courtiers, in the days of good Queen Bess, so you will have no need to be ashamed of my past."

And, Lydia, if you marry me you will be the means of saving a life—you will snatch me from the grasp of the evil passions which devour my soul; you will make Ralph Howard, the buccaneer, Ralph Howard, the gentleman."

Lydia shuddered.
"I tremble at the thought," she said. "How can you wash from your hands the stain of innocent blood?"

"I never shed it."
"What! have you not plundered merchantmen? Have you not fought innocent men for the wealth they bore across the seas?" cried Lydia, excitedly. "Each life lost in such an encounter has been murder for which you are answerable, Ralph Howard."

The pirate smiled.
Not angrily.
"Nay, then, dearest Lydia," he said. "Do not judge me so harshly. If you do, you judge also your friend Jack Gale and his companions."

"How so?"
"Because I am no worse than they," he replied; "the *Vulture*, the vessel on board which he first served was a privateer; nothing more nor less than a buccaneer. Her captain had letters of marque, authorizing him to attack any ship on the high seas, and he did so. Had he, by the laws of morality, any more right than myself?"

Lydia made no answer.
"And your friend, Jack Gale," pursued Howard, earnestly, "he, too, has fought with these innocent merchantmen, or if not, he accepted his commission in order to do so; and the will and the intention are as bad as the deed itself. Can you answer me?"

The pirate pleaded well.
Lydia saw this, saw that he was putting Jack metaphorically in a corner, and so she avoided a straightforward reply.
"This is nothing to me, Ralph Howard," she said. "I admit that the times are so strange and so troublous that it is difficult to tell which is a buccaneer and which a privateer. But then this has no reference to marriage. Spare yourself annoyance, spare yourself humiliation, by believing me when I say that I can never be your wife. I shall never marry again. My love for my murdered husband is too great."

The pirate had lost his nature, as it were, for the moment.
His reckless daring aspect had gone.
He flung himself at her feet, on his knees, and took her hand, gazing up into her eyes with an eager yearning look, which was painful to witness.

"Lydia," he cried, passionately, ignoring altogether her words, "be mine, and you shall be as rich as a princess. You shall be the wealthiest lady in the country; your home shall be a paradise. Lydia, save me from myself, save me from the past, give to me a future, and you will have done a great and noble deed to Ralph Howard, the buccaneer."

LYDIA would have been less than a woman if she had remained unmoved as Ralph Howard spoke his earnest words.

She saw in fact that he was in terrible earnest, and she pitied him.

Pity they say is akin to love.
It was not so in her case.

She sprang suddenly to her feet.
"Ralph Howard!" she said, "I can hear no more! You have my heartfelt sympathy, but my love is buried in the grave of the one who is dead. Say no more. Try to be the gentleman you could be—without me. Renounce your daring life, and—"

He also sprang to his feet.
The old pirate blazed forth again within him.
He saw, he felt her coldness, her utter indifference to him, and these irritated him more than all the contempt and insult she could have heaped upon his head.

"No, by St. Peter!" he cried, fiercely, "I will not now renounce my roving life. I have offered to do so; but you have destroyed all my good resolutions, you have cast to the winds the gentle thoughts which wooed me towards home and England. No, I will be a rover still, and you shall be mine! The woman who refused to save a life, a soul, who refused to wed Ralph Howard the gentleman, shall be the bride of Ralph the Avenger, and skim the wide seas with him."

"Away, remorse! Away moments of pining regret! I am once more Ralph, the Terror of the Seas; and you, my dainty lady, who chill to my touch, who reject the nearest pleadings of my soul, shall be my forced bride."

All the savagery of his nature had returned, the wine he had imbibed had mounted to his brain, and catching the unsuspecting Lydia in his arms, he rained passionate kisses on her lips.

Then he released her with a laugh which

sounded unearthly, and thrilled even the nerves of Emily in the other room.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, as the trembling woman shrank back, pale and terrified, into the farthest corner of the chamber, "so you thought you had tamed the lion! You thought that the lava blood of Italy had ceased to run in my veins, and had attuned itself to the icy current of yours."

"No, no! it only slept! I am Ralph the Avenger once more—the sea my home, my sword my bond, my will law! Farewell for a few hours. When we meet again, it will be at the altar, and you shall be the rover's bride!"

And the passion-racked man strode from the room into the one adjoining, where an interview—similar to the other, but without its storms—had taken place between Emily and Norman.

"Norman, come with me!" cried Ralph the Avenger, as he hastened to the other door.

And his young lieutenant, with a look of warning and meaning at Emily, instantly followed him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE ATTEMPTED ESCAPE—LEONI IN A NEW CHARACTER.

THE instant that the door had closed upon the forms of Ralph Howard and his lieutenant, Emily hastened into the adjoining room, whence the sound of heavy sobs could be distinctly heard.

She found her sister extended on a sofa, crying bitterly.

Kneeling down, she passed her arm around the beloved form, and pressed her lips to the red, burning cheek.

"Do not give way to useless sorrow," she whispered. "Confide in me, my darling sister. I think I have good news for you."

"Good news!" cried Lydia. "You can bring nothing of that kind to me. Listen, while I tell you all I have gone through."

And so, with her arms round her sister's neck, she told her all.

Emily listened patiently till the end.
Then she said, with a soft and gentle smile, while she kissed her sister fondly:

"Dearest Lydia, take heart of grace. I see a way out of all this difficulty."

Lydia sat up, eagerly.
Her face, tear-swept and flushed, was still suffused with a pleasant smile.

"Ah, Emily," she said, "I am afraid you look upon everything in too easy a manner. I see nothing but black despair before me; you see happiness and—"

"Nay, Lydia," returned Emily, "do not speak like that. When you know all, you will see that to save us I must sacrifice my self-respect, and stoop even to falsehood so that we may escape."

Her cherry lips quivered as she spoke.
"But Heaven, I feel sure, will forgive me," she went on, "in such a cause. Listen, now, to me, and see if I am not right."

She told her that Norman had implored and entreated her to accept his love.

Emily, while listening, or rather pretending to listen to all his words, had conceived a plan, which she forthwith put into practice.

It was this:

He was to secure the escape of her sister Lydia that very night, when Ralph Howard was overcome by liquor, and on that condition she had consented to become Norman Rae's wife.

He, of course, would be unable to remain in Howard's ship after contributing to the escape of Lydia, and consequently they had arranged that all three should start together for the frontier.

There Lydia would be given into the charge of the authorities, who would send her to England, while Emily would remain with Norman in sunny Italy.

The young girl smiled amid tears, as she concluded:

"Oh, Lydia, you would (if things were not so dreadfully sad and despairing) have felt inclined to laugh at the way in which I deceived him. He thoroughly believed me, passed his arm round my waist, and attempted to kiss me, made me promise not to give a chance of suspicion to Howard, and, believing in my protestations, was about to again try and kiss me, when fortunately Howard strode in."

"And when is the attempt to be made?" said Lydia, roused up to something like her former self by the chance of flight.

"This very night," said Emily; "so you have only to get yourself ready. I will answer for Norman; he is thoroughly deceived by me."

"At what time?"

"That I do not know," replied Emily; "that depends, of course, upon the time when Howard is overcome by drink. Norman sups with them, and will see to that."

"But I do not see one thing," said Lydia. "I fear after all you are too enthusiastic. How are we to rid ourselves of Norman? He may pretend many things in order to win you over, but how do you know what companions he may have with him in this adventure?"

"We must chance all that," said Emily. "The great thing is to get out in the open air, where we can have a chance of speaking to strangers who will help us. Surely, Lydia, you will not draw back?"

Need we say that instead of drawing back Lydia at once agreed to join her sister in her attempt.

Anxiously they awaited the signal of Norman, the traitor.

It was but a very short time before it came, but it seemed as if it were an age.

At length, however, just after midnight, it came.

Three light taps were given at the door, as had been agreed upon; and as Emily flew to the door to open it, Norman stood on the threshold.

"Are you ready?" he whispered.

He was ready dressed for traveling.

"Yes," said Emily; "but are you sure all is safe; are you certain that he sleeps?"

"Yes, pray tell us that," said Lydia, with one of her old shudders of dread; "for if he awoke to find us escaping I know not what would be the result."

Norman shrugged his shoulders.

"No one knows better about that than I do," he said. "I should be the first to suffer, and I should never suffer after. If all were not safe I should not be here. Come quickly while everything is still. The wine was strong, but the drug within it was stronger, and you can be assured that there is no cause for alarm from Ralph the Avenger."

The two sisters had long since made up their minds.

For them to draw back now would be madness.

"We are ready," said Lydia. "Lead the way."

Norman cautiously, in spite of the assurance of his speech, led the way down the chamber where Ralph and his friends had been carousing, and straight on towards the street door.

There was no shadow of an obstacle.

All was still as death.

The door was unlocked.

The street reached.

All was quiet there as in the house.

They made no pause.

The door was closed cautiously behind them.

They began to pass along the street.

The escape had commenced.

* * * * *

About three hours before the escape of Lydia and her sister from the house, a strange scene was being enacted at the office of the Italian Prefecture of Police.

The prefect, an old white-haired soldier, was seated at his desk reading a communication from the government, when the messenger brought him a letter.

He expressed his annoyance at its contents when he had read it by flinging it violently down on the desk.

"Basta! these English!" he cried. "Cospetto! If it were my affair— But there, it is not so—Josefo, there!"

These last words were bawled out in a loud voice.

Instantly a man appeared, dressed in the garb of the Italian police.

"Josefo," said Signor Vansanello, "two English gentlemen, very rich, have arrived in this town."

"Si, signor."

"They need protection while they remain."

"Si, signor."

And the man's eyes glistened with greed.

He had had jobs of this kind before, and knew their worth.

"These gentlemen," pursued the captain of the police, "are stopping at present at the 'Hotel Villafranca.' They have already experienced the delicate attention of our brigands, and consequently, as they have with them a very great sum of money, they desire protection. See, therefore, Josefo, that proper dispositions of your forces are made, and let me not hear of any pilferings."

"And the names of the illustrious gentlemen?" suggested the police-officer.

"White and Smith," replied Vansanello.

And the man with a low bow retired.

The proceedings of Josefo after this were peculiar, to say nothing more.

He sought among the reserve police at the head office certain men whom he well knew, and with each of them he held a long and earnest conversation.

Then he hastened off to the "Hotel Villafranca," and had an interview with the English-

men—two very ordinary-looking specimens, of the traveling species.

Then he made his way into various quarters of the town, in each of which he entered a low-looking house, from which soon after his visit there issued a man, dressed in the police uniform.

But were they police?

That was the question.

At any rate, at the hour when Norman and his two companions hurried away from the house of Ralph Howard, the streets of the town were fairly bristling with emissaries, or at any rate supposed emissaries, of the law.

If Lydia and Emily had known what had been so unexpectedly passing, their hearts would have been full of joy.

Their object, of course, was to obtain, by some means or another, access to Signor Vansanello, and then they felt that their troubles would be over.

To do Norman Rae justice, he never for one moment dreamt of suspecting the truth of what Emily had said to him.

She little guessed how soon retribution was to fall upon her for the little fault which she had committed more for her sister than for herself.

Although Norman was one of Ralph Howard's band, he was little known.

His sojourn on shore had been exceptional, and he had never yet come into serious conflict with the authorities.

So he led them on without any misgivings as to the slightest chance of his being recognized by any one.

Suddenly, however, the whole aspect of affairs was changed for him.

As they came round the corner of a street where there was a greater glow of light than in the other thoroughfares, Lydia and Emily observed that they had left behind them some police, and that in front were a number of them also.

Emily's heart leaped with joy.

"Lydia," she whispered, "now is our time. The police will save us, I know."

"Courage, then, and act," said Lydia.

Emily hesitated not.

She sprang forward instantly, and seizing a policeman by the arm, exclaimed:

"Quick—save me from this man!"

For an instant the stranger was taken aback by the suddenness of the words, but more apparently by the intonation of the voice.

But he recovered himself in a moment.

"Here, Guiseppe! Battisto!" he cried. "Here is a lady in distress! Assist me! Ah! two signoras. *Cospetto!* but the chief will be astounded."

For a few moments Norman Rae was so utterly astounded that he could take no active part in the matter.

Lydia and Emily consequently had time to place themselves under the protection of the police before he recovered himself, and when he dashed forward, sword in hand, they were ready for him.

"Come, come, signor," cried one of the police, in a gruff voice, "this town is under martial law. We can't allow swords in the streets."

"But these are friends of mine," said Norman. "This young lady is my betrothed wife, and —"

The other laughed.

"Ah, well, the signora has changed her mind," said the policeman. "She has placed herself under our protection, and we are bound, consequently, to do as she desires."

"She shall never live to deceive me," cried Norman, fiercely.

And he leaped towards Emily.

But his intention was frustrated.

It was a deadly one, for his constant contact with Italians had made him as hot-headed as they were.

The men with whom he had to contend knew his purpose, and intercepted his dashing leap at once.

"Do you want to spend your night in one of Signor Vansanello's private rooms?" said one of them, as they knocked his sword out of his hand and seized him. "If so, come with us at once. It is your wish that he should be arrested, signora?"

"No, no!" cried Emily (her heart could not bring itself to what seemed an act of deliberate treachery). "No, no; let him go! All we wish for is our escape."

"Not without me, traitress!" exclaimed Norman.

And, drawing his pistol from his belt, he aimed direct for Emily's head.

The pistol was fired.

But it was not destined to harm the one for whose destruction it was intended.

The deadly messenger hit—it killed—not Emily, but one of the police.

In an instant there was a fracas.

Four or five men at once precipitated themselves upon Norman Rae.

The latter, mad with passion, thought not of the number of his enemies, but attacked them furiously.

The result may well be imagined.

Unable to cope with so many foes, he nevertheless fought with the determined resolution of a desperate suicide, hoping only to reach the girl who had so easily duped him.

But he had not even the chance.

At a peculiar whistle others had gathered round, and in a few minutes Lydia and Emily were hurried away by their new protectors.

Norman Rae lay dead, with a sword wound right through his heart.

The two sisters scarcely noticed anything for the first part of the time during which they were hurried along.

But presently they could not help observing that they were rapidly leaving the town behind them.

Even then, however, not a suspicion of evil entered their minds.

The town was evidently in an extra state of excitement.

The force of police which had been put on at a moment's notice appeared to give them reason for suspecting something unusual was happening.

Consequently, as they left the inhabited part of the thoroughfares behind them, the two girls made no remark.

But presently the first faint suspicion entered their minds.

"Where can they be taking us?" said Lydia, in an undertone.

Of course she need not have taken the precaution of speaking softly.

Not one of her companions understood the English language.

But they had been served such strange and unaccountable tricks that they were afraid of speaking, no matter in what language.

"I can't tell, indeed," said Emily.

She was afraid to give vent to her real thoughts. She, too, had her suspicions.

Presently Lydia spoke to one of the men,

"Do we go much farther out of town?"

"No, signora."

"How far, then?"

"Do you see yonder lights?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"The lights of the convent of St. Antonio."

Lydia's heart trembled.

What could this mean?

The name had an evil omen to her.

Was it not connected with the strange monk, Alfieri?

Lydia started.

At any rate, it was best to know the worst.

There seemed some error.

"Excuse me, signor," she said, in her most silvery of accents, "we do not desire to go to any convent."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"We have been misinformed, then?"

"Yes, most decidedly," replied Lydia. "We sought your protection in order to be taken before Signor Vansanello, and be by him sent on board an English vessel."

"Ah! was it so? Then I regret the programme cannot be carried out," said the man. "We are under higher orders even than his."

"Not in regard to us!" said Lydia, with dignity.

"Yes."

"And from whom?"

The man laughed lightly.

"Ah," he said, "that is a thing which I cannot tell you now, but which you will learn soon enough. Let us press on, madame. You will find yourself in good hands."

"Very probably in what you consider 'good hands,'" replied Lydia, endeavoring to keep calm, "but we may differ from you. We English are very obstinate, and like to have our own way; and consequently, as we started out to have an interview with Signor Vansanello, we desire to have it as soon as possible."

The man gave vent at this to a muttered exclamation of annoyance.

"Signora," he said, "I can no longer delay. I am under orders, and cannot permit anything to go against them."

There was no gainsaying him.

"Emily," said Lydia, in a low voice, gentle, but tremulous with awakened horror, "I fear we are again betrayed."

"And through me," murmured Emily.

"You acted for the best," said Lydia. "You need not reproach yourself."

"I do: I must. If anything wrong happens I have myself to blame."

And the young girl's tears started readily.

"Nay, then," said Lydia, "I cannot listen to your words. You have done all for the best."

They were not long in going the rest of their journey toward St. Antonio.

There was indeed nothing to stop them.

Dressed in the uniform of the police, they had no need to fear interruption from any one, being quite as well armed as any brigands or soldiers they might meet.

Presently, therefore, the high iron gates of the convent were reached.

Here they paused, and the leader of the party rung at once a loud-sounding bell.

"I decline to enter this place," said Lydia, firmly.

The man gave the old familiar shrug.

"I cannot help that," he said. "That has nothing to do with me. You must complain to my superiors."

In a few moments the door of the convent opened, and across the yard came two nuns to open the gates.

A few words from the leader of the party seemed at once intelligible to these women.

The gates were flung open wide.

The party entered, and within the space of a few minutes the two sisters were in a room which they were told was their apartment.

"But we do not understand all this," said Lydia to the nuns, who remained in the room while the police departed. "We sought the protection of these police in order to escape from the power of an enemy."

"Yes."

"And we demanded to be taken before Signor Vansanello."

"Yes."

"And we are here."

"But you have made a great mistake," said one of the nuns; "you are not in the hands of the police."

"Of whom, then?"

"Of Leon!"

"Leon! And we are in a convent?"

"Again wrong," said the nun, smiling. "You are in a monastery. Leon is only a patriot whom we respect. You English, doubtless, fancy him a bad character. He is not to us."

"A villain, a murderer, a coward!" cried Emily, almost fiercely.

"That is a bad character for any one to bear," said a mild voice.

And turning, at its familiar sound, they saw Alfieri, the monk.

"I greet you with surprise, but with great pleasure," said the priest, in a voice which was evidently jeering, but was so intoned as to appear expressive of deep respect. "This meeting is indeed an unexpected one."

"We desire, most holy father," said Lydia, "to quit this place at once, and to proceed at once back to the town, from which we have been brought by mistake."

"It would be useless to waste time or to upset your minds," said Alfieri. "I am a friend of Leon's, and I know that were it possible under the circumstances, he would be here, openly, himself. As it is, I must give you warning of another journey to-night. St. Antonio is a monastery, though indeed for lack of room, there are about thirty cells given up to the weaker sex, since St. Eustace was sacked and plundered by the French. So you will have to take your departure to the convent of St. Christopher within two hours."

An appeal was on Lydia's lips.

But she quickly drew her words back.

Alfieri was a priest truly.

But she knew him of old, and mistrusted him.

Within an hour the two girls were once more on a journey, and were being conveyed further up the hills to the convent of St. Christopher.

CHAPTER XLV.

ON THE TRACK OF THE PIRATES—DUTY BEFORE PLEASURE—ALFIERI ONCE MORE.

We must now return to the moment of Jack Gale's arrival in Reggio.

The two pirates who had at once attracted the attention of Jack and his friends in the wine-shop were too far gone in the enjoyment of their cups to observe, or at any rate to take much notice of our hero and his seven companions.

"What is to be done, Ben?" cried Jack to his faithful old boson. "Duty bids me go straight ahead without passing to the right or the left, but—"

"Pleasure!" suggested Ben, with a sly smile.

"No, no, Ben," returned Jack. "What I was going to say was this, my inclination would lead me to proceed with my own adventure, and follow these rascally pirates to their death."

"Ah! I've no doubt of it, sir," said Ben; "but

what's to be done? The captain's orders must be obeyed."

"Yes, you are right," said Jack; "but I have a lingering feeling, which will remain unsatisfied as long as those villains are unpunished, and their victims still in their hands."

"You mean revenge—that's the lingering feeling," said Ben. "I can't blame ye, but can't ye manage both things?"

"No," said Jack, with a sigh; "I must go straight ahead in the morning. Until then, my time is my own, and I shall track them."

"Good, I'm with you," replied Ben.

"No, no," said Jack, "I don't want to start tomorrow with a fagged-out escort. I and Juanita will dog these fellows' footsteps. But here comes the dancers. Do not let us talk too much or we shall attract attention."

The dancers consisted of some four or five girls with excellent figures, and the languid facial beauty, peculiar to Italians, and their performances were of so eccentric and so amusing a nature that the attention of every one in the place was at once riveted upon the stage.

Taking advantage of this, Jack contrived to explain everything to Juanita.

She quickly arranged how they were to act.

The first step was to procure a place for Ben and his men to sleep in, so as to be sure they would not be followed, and then start off and watch for the coming of the two pirates.

Juanita was not one to let the grass grow under her feet.

She at once rose, saying she would be back soon, and passed out into the busy thoroughfare.

She was absent about half an hour, and when she returned Jack was able to explain to Ben Brace that she had secured them a lodging where they could all rest in safety until the morning, and that he had better go out with her and arrange about everything.

Ben did so.

But in his honest, though dogged heart, he was resolved as regards one thing.

The other sailors might snore away for weeks if they liked, but he would follow the fortunes of the young officer whom he had sworn to watch over.

If he was not permitted to do so openly, he would go privately, or in other words, he would slink after him in the darkness.

This plan he confided quietly to Tom Meadows, who sat beside him, and who, as may be imagined, entered into the idea eagerly.

The performance was supposed to be over at twelve.

At half-past eleven Juanita escorted the men to their destination, and then returned to Jack.

The two pirates remained until the last, and then after partaking of a most unnecessary "one drop more of wine," they rolled out into the street, where Juanita and Jack were waiting for them, hidden away in an archway near at hand.

They made their way in the direction of the quay, near which several vessels were lying.

"If they are going on board one of those ships," said Jack in a low tone, "I am afraid we have had all our labor in vain."

"I hope it is not so," replied Juanita. "But there may be now a chance of their turning up one of these narrow lanes. See, there they go. We have not missed them after all."

Juanita and Jack crossed the road as quickly as they could, and unobserved by the two sailors, who were now very far gone in intoxication; when just as they were about to turn down the lane, a sudden rush of light from a large lantern full in their faces caused them to spring back.

As they did so, nearly falling over one another, and stumbling against the wall for support, the light suddenly went out, leaving them for a moment, as it were, in blinding darkness.

Then, as they recovered themselves, they heard the clash of swords, and as they dashed round the corner, they could tell that a deadly conflict was proceeding.

"The pirates have met with enemies," said Juanita. "We had better hasten on, and take sides with them, and then perhaps we shall learn what we want from their very lips."

The words were no sooner out of her mouth, when a cry of agony rang through the air, and as they dashed along the narrow lane they saw a man lying alone and bleeding in the center of the thoroughfare.

Not a human being else was in sight.

"What is the matter?" said Juanita, as she knelt down by the side of the wounded man, whose face was scarcely visible in the dim light.

"I'm dying," he said, in a thick, hoarse voice—ay, dying. I and my companions were attacked, and then I was stabbed, because I would not give up my money."

There was just light enough to tell that he was one of the pirates whom they had seen in the wine shop, and that was all.

"Where is your companion?" said Jack.

"I don't know. I think they stabbed him and carried him away," said the man in low accents, tremulous with pain. "They would have served me the same had you not come up in time. Pray take me to some house where I can die in peace, and not out here like a dog."

Jack glanced round, and saw that close to the spot was a small tenement, where a light could be seen in the parlor window.

Here he immediately knocked, and was answered by a bullet-headed Italian, who scowled ferociously at them.

"What is it ye want?" he said.

"Here is a poor fellow wounded, and—"

"Ah!" he cried, "a sailor. We've had enough of such fellows as that. Go elsewhere for charity. You won't get any here."

"We don't ask for charity," said Jack, "for whatever accommodation you afford this poor fellow you will be paid amply."

These words altered the case at once.

He grumbled out a speedy acquiescence, and in a few minutes the dying pirate was carried into the house.

Juanita had sent a boy for a doctor.

Never was death stamped upon the face of any one so plainly as it was on that of the pirate.

As his senses nevertheless appeared to return under the influence of a stimulant, he seemed at once to recognize the features of Jack Gale.

"Ah!" he said, "I know you. Do you remember me?"

"Yes, I do," replied Jack. "You are one of the band of which Leoni is the chief."

"Yes, your enemy."

"I know that."

"Yet you have helped me."

"Why not! That is what we are taught, is it not?—to forgive our enemies," said Jack Gale.

The man shook his head.

"I do not understand what you mean," he said. "My teaching is different. What I have been taught is that a man should punish where punishment is due; that a man should have revenge on those who act evilly to him; that—but never mind; you have been my enemy, and have returned good for evil, and I will not prove ungrateful. You seek Leoni and Alfieri?"

"I do."

"I know not where you will find the former," said the pirate, "but the priest is to be found at the monastery of St. Antonio, just on the hill beyond the town to the left."

Jack's heart leaped joyously.

This was good news indeed.

He had long been well aware that the priest was a false friend, that, no matter what villainy was afoot, he was hand and glove with Leoni, and that he was to be trusted neither in word nor deed.

Prepared thus, he hoped now to be a match for him whenever he met him.

"I thank you," he said. "Perhaps when I have found Alfieri, I may be on the track of the others."

"You need the will of the serpent to be on equal terms with Alfieri," said the dying pirate. "But here comes the doctor. He will tell you that I have my passport for the next world."

A little dark-complexioned, black-haired man here bustled into the room, and proceeded to examine his patient.

"No hope," was written plainly on his grave features.

But he did not say so to the man.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "you sailors are too fond of knives. But we will do the best for you."

To Jack, as he went to the door, he said:

"He can't live till morning, poor devil."

The man soon after this died.

He could give no further information.

The object of the attack upon him was simply robbery, from all they could gather, and so Juanita and Jack left him, when he had breathed his last, to be taken off to the dead-house to be claimed.

On this occasion Ben Brace and Tom Meadows were completely defeated in their friendly intentions.

The adventure which had brought such pleasing information to Jack Gale happened so rapidly that they had had no time to follow it up, and they went wandering about the town eagerly, searching in every possible quarter, until at last they returned to the lodging-house, to find Jack and Juanita lying on their respective piles of skins fast asleep.

"Shiver my timbers!" cried Ben, setting his arms akimbo, "this 'ere is a go. Master Jack's stolen a march upon us this time and no mistake."

Tom laughed.

"Ah, this pleases me," he said. "It puts me in mind of the old times, when he used to be al-

ways up to larks at the old farm. Poor Master Jack! he's had enough to make him forget how to have a bit of fun the last few months, I should think."

"Yes," said Ben, as he flung himself down in a corner of the one big room which had been accorded them. "Yes, I should think so too. But he's got the heart of a lion. He'll stand a great deal of beating."

In a few moments all was hushed in the room, save for the heavy breathing of the sleepers.

Half an hour passed.

The town without was very still.

In the house you might have heard a pin fall.

But at the end of the half-hour there was the sound of creaking on the stairs, and then the door opened—slowly, cautiously.

Two heads were then protruded through the opening.

In the sleeping apartment, where the occupants were slumbering gently in all kinds of postures, a dim lamp was burning, and the faces could only be indistinctly seen.

"Let me go in," said a voice. "I shall know them in a moment."

"Go in if you like," said a gruffer voice, "but remember that a very little may wake them, and that I wear a long knife in my belt."

This to a stranger might have seemed a threat, but to the one to whom it was addressed it was evidently a powerful deterrent.

"All right," was the reply, in a cold tone of repressed annoyance.

The door was then noiselessly pushed open, and two figures entered.

The one was the keeper of the lodging-house, a determined-looking man with black hair, a bullet head, and eager, restless eyes.

The other was Alfieri, the mysterious monk! The latter was pale, and evidently laboring under intense emotion.

He approached each of the sleepers in turn, and exhibited no interest as he scanned the faces of the sailors of the *Tormentor*.

But when he saw the tanned and dusky faces of Ben Brace and Tom Meadows he paused, and his hand naturally crept to the dagger which was concealed under his priestly robe.

"No blood can be shed here at present, so have a care," said the keeper of the house—"have a care. Remember my pistol."

"Basta!" replied the priest, in a savage whisper, "do you wish to wake them?"

The other man placed his hand significantly on the dagger with which the priest Alfieri was playing.

"No; and you—you, too, wish them to sleep," he said. "But it shall not be so. Come."

"Nay, there are two more," muttered Alfieri.

Then he advanced on tip-toe to the corner where Jack lay on his pile of skins, and Juanita lay a yard off on hers.

As the light was shed down upon this corner by the lantern, the priest could see both faces at once, and his features grew deadly pale.

"By the holy rood!" cried Alfieri, staggering back, "all Leoni's enemies here—all within my grasp! Antonio, you shall be rich; you shall have absolution for your sins; you shall have money to fly from Italy, and live in some other land—happy, prosperous, in peace. But let me do my desire. Four thrusts, and all will be over."

"Priest, in one moment," replied the calm, cold voice of the lodging-house keeper—"in one moment I will awaken them all, and leave you to their tender mercies, and that will be death."

There was no chance evidently of buying him off.

He was resolute and brave.

"I will have revenge for all this," said Alfieri, in a low voice, hoarse with passion, as they crept noiselessly from the room and closed the door.

The man whom he had addressed as Antonio shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please," he said—"as you please. I do not fear you. I know which side my bread is buttered, and I am quite satisfied with the money I earn without priestly gifts. So you see your gold does not tempt me, your threats do not make me tremble, and as for your absolution—bah!"

And he snapped his fingers in token of utter contempt.

They had reached the basement by the time he finished speaking.

"You insult me now," said the priest, "because you are on safe ground. But I warn you I shall not forget. You saw to-night what a splendid memory I have for faces. I have just as good a memory for injuries."

"I don't say you haven't," said Antonio. "I never denied it. But I am tired, and it is nearly morning, so adieu."

And he shut the door in the priest's face.

Alfieri was absolutely convulsed with passion, but he did not dare give way to it."

He knew Antonio was too well guarded to care for any single attempt at assassination, and he had to bottle up his revenge till a future day.

One thing, however, rejoiced him.

His enemies, as he chose to call Jack and his friends, were on Italian soil again, and near him, and there was a chance, perhaps, at last of a final destruction of their plans, and, if fortune favored him, their death.

CHAPTER XLVI.

EN ROUTE FOR THE ENGLISH CAMP—BRIGANDS ONCE MORE.

LITTLE dreaming of the evil eyes which had peered at them in their peaceful sleep, our hero and his friends awoke next morning refreshed, and ready for their journey.

Antonio was wise in his generation.

He said not a word in regard to the visit of Alfieri.

That was a matter which (seeing that his guests were birds of passage) concerned him very little, and so he saw no reason why he should not be silent.

After a hearty breakfast the whole of the party set out.

It was by no means an awkward-looking little band that set off that morning from the busy town, and under the leadership of a guide who had been recommended by the authorities as being trustworthy and clever, made its way up the slopes of the vine-clad hills towards St. Aretto.

It stood not far from the town.

A gloomy, long, rambling edifice it was, with a high tower at one end frowning over the sea-kissed bay and the town that clustered busily around it, and Jack, as he passed it, felt he would give much to explore its silent interior.

But there was no excuse.

His business was not his own.

Every moment wasted now meant more perplexities and perils for the garrison of the miniature fortress they had left behind manned by Captains Halstead and Cameron.

And so, knowing that the lives of brave men depended upon his adroitness and rapidity of action, he only slackened speed to take in the general features of the place, and to notice exactly its position, and then urged his men on with redoubled speed.

The camp of the English general, it appeared, lay at the Castello, a fortified place some miles distant from the sea-coast, and on the other side of a range of hills, or, rather, mountains.

According to the many hints let fall by Carlo, the guide, moreover, it seemed more than likely that the party would be given a most favorable opportunity of renewing their acquaintance with the brigands.

"We shall soon be in the most dangerous part of the passes," said Carlo, "but we don't look as if we were worth attacking. The only way is to ride on and make a dash for it, if they make their appearance."

At this Jack pulled his rein, and gave the word to his companions to halt.

"I understood," he said, "that you were a guide, and if so, it is not your place to lead us into danger. I have no fear of these brigands, neither have our comrades; but we are not our own masters, and our first duty is to carry our dispatches to General Crawford."

At these words the guide looked very sheepish and downcast, although he tried to assume an air of gayety.

"Certainly, signor," he said, "you are right. But I understood you desired to go the nearest way."

"The nearest way is the safest way—the way where you are in no fear of interruptions," said Jack. "Is there no way by yonder valley?"

They were standing on a rock path on the face of the mountain, whence they could obtain a view of a wide and beautiful valley—a dream of beauty in the glow of that morning's sun.

"Yes, there is a way," said Carlo, hesitatingly.

"Then," said Jack, "we will go that way. Let us return at once by this pathway, and when we reach yonder road do you go in front, and if I see a brigand I will put a bullet through your head to make sure that I am safe of one enemy at any rate."

The man could not repress a scowl at this.

"That fellow is a traitor," said Juanita, in an undertone to Jack, "and you have found him out in time. If you had not he would have taken us into the very den of the brigands. I fancy I know his face, but I will not attempt to recognize him. He does not know me now, and it is well he should not."

Carlo, however, was equal to the occasion.

He saw that he had been suspected, and he endeavored at once to restore confidence.

"Perhaps, signor," he said, "you think I am not best pleased at this change of route. I answer freely, I am not. I had hoped to avoid the valley, where live my friends, with whom I have quarreled; but still, I must do as you wish, as I am for the time being in your service."

Jack made no reply.

He was sufficiently convinced that the man was a traitor, and resolved that if he led them into danger he would stretch him lifeless at his feet.

The journey was now a beautiful one. It lay along a road, one side of which was skirted by a pleasant stream, on the banks of which were frequent cottages, while on the other were fields and vineyards lying in the shadow of the mountains.

Every now and then a man, gun in hand, would start up from behind a piece of rock or a clump of trees, and glance at the travelers.

"We are well out of those hills, Master Jack," said Ben Brace. "It strikes me this ere guide with the name of my old captain's dog—this man Carlo, here—is nothing but a mountain robber in disguise. What do you think, Tom?"

"Perhaps Master Jack may fancy I'm prejudiced," said Tom Meadows, "but I never did like these Italians, and never shall. They always seem to me snaky and treacherous. But perhaps it's my English-born ways, and I can't help it."

"I don't think you're far wrong," said Jack; "at any rate, in this case. That man is a traitor—I feel sure of it; and when I give you the signal, fire at him, if I miss him."

This was quite enough.

Coming from Jack, the words were very significant, and during the remainder of the journey across the valley the guide seemed on his best behavior.

As they dashed along, he never even glanced to the right or the left, fearing that any look, misunderstood, might lead to the crashing of a bullet through the brain.

At length, as they approached a village, Jack espied a young Italian idly swinging on a gate.

He at once called a halt.

"See to the guide," he said, addressing Ben Brace, "and I will go and speak to yonder idler."

He rode forward quickly as he spoke.

The young Italian gazed at him with lazily startled eyes; then, as he comprehended the situation, he smiled, saying:

"You want a guide, and you fear the one you have. Good; I will be your guide for good pay."

"You shall be paid well," said Jack, "that I promise you. But I have paid a man well before, and he has betrayed me. Do you know him—in the blue velvet jacket at the head of my troop?"

The young fellow glanced up.

"Know him?" he said. "Yes, I know him. He is Carlo, the brigand."

"The brigand!" exclaimed Jack. "Is he well-known to be so?"

"Ay," said the youth, laughing; "he was a brigand, and, therefore, he has the name of one. But he is supposed now to have given up such evil ways."

And he laughed lightly.

"He doesn't appear to me to have given up his ways at all," said Jack, pretending to fall in with the man's humor. "I believe he is even now in league with them, and as I do not wish my men and myself to fall into an ambush, I have refused to trust to him any longer as a guide. If you choose to accept the service, you shall be paid well, and I will give you some gold now in earnest of my intentions."

The man smiled with unequivocal pleasure.

"I am at your service, signor," he said. "And whither, may I ask, do you wish to go?"

"To the camp of General Crawford."

"Certainly," said the Italian, "certainly. And what of Carlo?"

"He will be disarmed and put under arrest."

The man shrugged his shoulders in a resigned kind of way.

"Well, it cannot be helped," he said. "There is one more enemy for me. I must put up with it, and do the best I can. When do we start?"

"Now," said Jack, as he handed him a couple of gold pieces. "Wait for me a moment here."

Then, riding back, he gave the word to Ben Brace and Tom Meadows, and in less time than it takes to describe this, Carlo was disarmed, and a prisoner.

He said but few words.

He knew, in fact, that he had been discovered, and that the less he said the better.

"You have arrested me," he said. "You do not suppose that I shall forgive or forget?"

"That is immaterial," said Jack. "We are in a country which is under the invasion of a foreigner, and we are bound to protect ourselves as we best can."

It was some time ere they reached the camp of General Crawford, but the journey was made quickly, and through a pleasant and luxuriant country.

Crawford received them with surprise, and was greatly astonished, yet pleased, when he heard of the daring enterprise of Captain Cameron.

"I am very glad indeed to hear of this," he said. "And I must congratulate you, Mr. Gale, upon the splendid report of your services, which accompanies this letter. I only wish that instead of belonging to the sister service, you belonged to the army, so that I could have you with me."

Jack flushed with pleasure at this candid recognition of his conduct.

"No doubt," said the general, "you are anxious to return to the succor of this brave man, but to properly aid him, and enable him to drive these brigands into the sea, you must take a large force with you. The *Tormentor* will not hold the number of soldiers I can spare, and consequently some one must return soon to Benvenuto with a dispatch to one of the English ships in harbor to hold itself in readiness to embark men to-night or at early dawn. I fancy I can trust no one better than yourself."

"I am quite willing to undertake the task," said Jack. "When I have rested my men, I will at once return to the town."

This being arranged, and Carlo, the brigand, having been placed in the safe custody of some of the soldiers, Jack's sailors were taken to the canteen, and our hero and Juanita were conducted to the general's tent, where they had a long private conversation.

It was towards evening before the return journey was begun, the new guide being with them, and Carlo being left behind to be brought on to Benvenuto by the soldiers.

The morning had, as I have said, been exceptionally bright, but during the afternoon the clouds began to lower, and as the little party, mounted as they were on fresh horses, began to approach the hills, a heavy mist began to descend from their summits and swoop suddenly down upon the lowlands.

Before they had got half-way across the valley, the mist was so dense that they had to rein in their horses and proceed cautiously for fear of riding into the river.

They had gone on for some time when they fancied they heard peculiar noises around them.

What they were they could not rightly tell, as the mist so deadened every sound, but presently a loud voice shouted in Italian—

"Halt, on your lives! You are surrounded!"

Then, as Jack and his party paused, uncertain how to act, torches were seen held high aloft by men who approached in front, on the right, and in the rear.

On the other side was water.

"Quick, boys, at them!" cried Jack; "we must not be taken. Let us fight and swim the river."

And, as an example, he struck down a brigand and then plunged with his war-horse into the midst of the mist-laden stream.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A PERILOUS RIDE.

It was a dangerous attempt to make this plunge into a swiftly-running river in the dark, the white mist surrounding it everywhere.

But there was less danger to them in the wildly-rushing water than in the fact of being captive with the brigands.

The latter meant certain death, for these men had no interest whatever in anything by way of ransom.

They knew well that it would be utterly useless to dream of reward in the case of a few sailors.

Their object was to capture their old foes and put them to death.

It was difficult to say how they had obtained knowledge of the fact that they were there at all, but probably some one had recognized them at the *cafe*, and had hurried up to the hills with the news.

At any rate, it was true enough that they had been discovered, and that these men had made an ambushade for the purpose of trapping them.

Jack's followers did not hesitate as he shouted to them to come after him, and a quick rattle of musketry was poured in upon them by the brigands.

It was not possible for them to take aim, but they knew pretty well how far the fugitives would be able to swim in a rough river on such a dark and foggy night, and every shot, consequently, had a good chance of taking effect.

Jack himself felt a rush of bullets pass his head, and presently he was wounded in the left arm.

But he still pressed on.

Juanita was close by his side, but it was almost impossible to see her, or indeed to speak to her.

"I fear we are in great danger, my brave girl," he said once.

"No matter; I am with you," was the softly-whispered response.

These words caused a strange feeling to pass through the mind of our hero.

He had noticed on several occasions lately how willing Juanita was to brave everything—to risk her life for him.

Could it be that she loved him?

He hoped not.

Juanita was beautiful.

But he loved Emily.

No one, while she lived, at any rate, would ever succeed in winning his heart.

However, this was not the time to think of such matters.

"I don't see I am much protection to you," said he; "in fact, I fear I have been the means of bringing you into unnecessary danger. However, you are right in thinking that I would do anything to secure your safety. This way, Juanita; let us land."

He shouted out to Ben Brace and the others, and hearing the words "Aye, aye, sir," indistinctly in the darkness, he concluded that all was right.

"This way, this way," he cried again, for his horse's feet had touched ground, and he knew that he was near the shore.

An answer came from behind him, and he and Juanita, pressing forward, were in a few more minutes ashore.

Here they waited for a short time for the rest of the party, and these having safely landed, they began their journey slowly along.

It was very dangerous work now.

They knew nothing of the place where they were traveling; there appeared no road, or at any rate, no proper path to traverse, and at length, when twice he had nearly ridden his horse into the river, Jack paused and called a halt.

They were in a most miserable plight—drenched to the skin, shivering in the dark, without the slightest knowledge of which way to turn.

"We had better remain where we are until this fog lifts," said Jack. "Our enemies cannot cross to us, and if we have some light we may be able to make our way across country before they are able to do anything against us."

This was decided upon, and so, just as they were, in the saddle, they remained, awaiting the dispersing of the fog.

They were agreeably surprised when, in about half an hour after their arrival on the bank of the river, a breeze arose, and the mist began steadily to dissipate, or rather move away further down the valley.

When it had completely disappeared, they were enabled to see by the bright moonlight how matters stood.

They were upon a road which ran along the side of the river, with dense trees on one side of it, while at some little distance they could perceive a bridge crossing the stream, which would conduct them back to the hilly road leading towards Benvenuto.

There was nothing visible of any brigands, only here and there the light of a torch flickering at intervals.

But these were at no great distance from the river, and to the rear.

Consequently there was not much chance of their being pursued.

They chanced this, however.

"Come on, boys," said Jack, and he led the way at a trot, with Juanita at his side, in the direction of the bridge.

He had noticed nothing particular in regard to her except that she was very silent.

She was sometimes given to fits of abstraction like this, however, and he did not consequently attach much importance to it.

Had he known the real cause of her silence, his heart would have bled for her.

But his thoughts were far away.

He saw in his mind's eye only the bright face of Emily.

Her voice it was that whispered on the breeze; her form that occupied his thoughts, while the young girl by his side, bleeding from a terrible wound in her shoulder, would not tell him of her misfortune, lest he should lag behind, and risk his life for her sake.

In fact, she loved him.

This young impetuous child of Italy had given her heart unsought into his keeping, and he knew it not.

It was best he should not.

So, unknowing her suffering, he hurried them on.

When they reached the bridge they were slightly above the level of the surrounding ground, and they paused to glance back.

Not a sign of their enemies was now to be seen.

"Now for the town," said Jack, "and on our way we will call at the convent of St. Antonio."

Juanita started.

She knew what this meant.

But was it safe for him to go?

Would he not be committing a breach of discipline by doing this?

"On your way, signor?" she said.

"Yes; it is but little out of the route."

"True, but—"

"But what, Juanita?" said Jack, laughing; "are you afraid of being recognized?"

The young girl sighed.

"Alas, he does not understand!" she murmured, lowly.

Then aloud she added:

"I was thinking, perhaps, that you might get into trouble with your commanders, if they knew that you delayed by going to the convent. Shall I go for you?"

Jack smiled.

"That would scarcely do," he said.

"Why?"

"Because I want to seek for some one—you know whom I mean, Juanita—Emily, the young lady who, with her sister, has been so long in the power of the pirates."

"I can take a letter to her for you, dear Jack," said Juanita; "that will be better than your getting into trouble."

"Ah, Juanita!" said our hero, with a laugh; "you do not understand. You will some day."

Some day!

If he could only have seen into her heart.

Poor girl!

He had unwittingly stolen it from her, and there was no hope of his loving her in return.

It was approaching the hour of dawn when they at length neared the convent; and hastening, with an eager heart, to the door, Jack rang the great bell.

An aged man, who took his turn in sitting in the dismal half-lit hall during the hours of darkness, opened the portal to them.

He did not seem very pleased when he saw that the new-comers were an armed party.

In those warlike days danger lurked in such visits as these.

But he was appeased at once by the manner of our hero.

And the name of Alfieri acted, moreover, as a talisman.

"Is he here?" asked Jack eagerly.

"No, but he will be here within a couple of hours," said the old man. "Will you rest till then?"

Jack paused a moment.

Juanita's words had, in fact, caused him to hesitate.

Was it a neglect of duty?

He certainly might receive a reprimand for not going on at once to the harbor.

But then Emily.

Might not his remaining be the means of saving her?

He would risk it.

"Yes," he said, "we will remain. We have had a severe tussle with the brigands, and my men would be glad of a rest."

As he uttered the word "brigands" a most peculiar look passed over the face of the old priest.

But it soon passed.

"Very well," he said; "your men can come and warm themselves in the big kitchen. You can await Alfieri in this private room."

He opened the door of a small chamber as he spoke, a dull desolate looking place enough, but one which was superior to the ordinary run of chambers in the monastery.

Into this Jack entered, and Juanita followed.

"I do not wish to be with the others," she said, "if you will allow me to remain with you."

The old priest lit a small lamp, and presently he brought them some refreshment.

Then he left them to themselves.

"Does that old man know you?" said Jack, when his footsteps had passed away.

"I know him; but why do you ask?" said Juanita.

"He gazed at you in such a peculiar manner," said our hero. "But what is the matter? You are deadly pale."

She smiled sadly.

"I am wounded," she said, "in my left shoulder."

"Why did you not tell me before?" asked Jack.

"I feared you would stop and incur some risk," said the young girl.

She could say no more.

A deadly faintness overcame her before she could drink the wine brought by the old priest, and she swooned away.

Jack at once poured some of the stimulant between her lips, and then tearing open the velvet jacket which Juanita wore in her character of a mountaineer lad, he examined her shoulder.

A ball had entered the chest of the unfortunate girl.

Bleeding had been going on till all her clothes were saturated.

There was nothing to be done except to hasten with her to a skillful surgeon.

But how was this to be accomplished?

If she had fainted only from the loss of blood and the pain, there was no reason why the stimulant should not rouse her sufficiently to resume her journey.

But if she had fainted from any other cause, it must be from internal hemorrhage, which might then and there prove fatal.

Eagerly he watched her after he had administered the wine, chafing her hands the while, until presently her dark eyes once more opened, and she gazed vacantly around her.

She blushed deeply as she found that her jacket was open, and that Jack had been examining her delicate white shoulder.

"Your wound is bad, Juanita," he said; "but the ball has passed through. If you feel well enough let us start once more for the town, that you may see a surgeon."

Juanita smiled as she readjusted her jacket, after Jack had placed a white handkerchief over the wound as a pad.

"And what of the English signorina?" she asked.

"I must return in search of her," said Jack. "I cannot think of anything but that your life is in danger."

"But what excuse will you make to the priest for altering your mind so?" said Juanita.

"I need explain nothing more than that I have glanced again at my dispatches, and find that I must not delay," said Jack.

And rising from his seat, he approached the door.

Then he started back in dismay.

It was locked on the outside!

Juanita saw the change upon his face, and started up.

"Ah! I might have known," she said, wringing her hands. "It is my fault—my fault!"

Jack saw that there was treachery somewhere.

But he could not see how the girl connected herself with it.

"There is a traitor here, certainly," he said, "but I cannot see how you can be to blame."

"For letting you trust that old priest," cried the girl. "He is an associate of Alfieri's, and is in some way connected with the brigands. It is a long time since I saw him, and my mind is somewhat confused on the subject. I was very young when I first saw the man, but I fear that he has somehow recognized me."

"But why should he lock us in?" asked Jack, as he knocked loudly at the door. "I cannot see what connection his knowledge of you has with my imprisonment."

Alas! he little knew the truth.

Little did he guess that at that very moment he was drifting rapidly back into the power of Leoni.

At first no answer came to his loud knocking.

Then a little window in the door was opened and the face of the priest appeared.

"What ails you, my son?" he said.

"Open this door," cried Jack.

"I cannot. It is against our rules," replied the soft voice of the old traitor.

"Rules!" thundered our hero; "do not talk of rules to me! I am an English officer, and the rules of an Italian monastery have nothing to do with me. Open at once!"

"I cannot," said the priest.

"I warn you," replied Jack, "that if any harm happens to me or my friends, your monastery will be razed to the ground."

"Your friends are not here," said the old man, calmly.

"Not here?" exclaimed Jack, overcome in an instant by the force of this unexpected blow.

"No; they have, by my direction, gone on to Benvenuto to take your message," said the old man, in whose eyes there was a malicious twinkle. "I told them that it was your wish that it should be so, and that you would await here the arrival of Alfieri."

"Trapped! trapped!" cried Jack. "But laugh not, old dotard! I warn you that a terrible retribution will be exacted when my friends return."

"Before then you will not be in this place, and you will be supposed to have followed them. But I waste my time here. Adieu. Benedicite!"

And with these words he departed.

Our hero sank into his chair, and covered his face with his hands.

He was only recalled to himself by becoming aware of the fact that Juanita was kneeling at his feet, and had clasped her arms round him.

As he glanced down, her lovely face, pale with pain and sorrow, was upturned to his, her beautiful eyes being brimful of tears.

"Jack, Jack," she cried, "this is all my fault. It is my great love for you that has been your ruin. If I had not loved you so I should not have come here with you to be recognized and caged like this. Oh, forgive me, Jack, forgive me!"

Jack bent and kissed her.

"I have nothing to forgive, Juanita," he said. "No doubt you have done everything for the best. Our thoughts now must not go back to the past. We must think how to escape."

Such an idea seemed a hopeless one.

The door of the chamber in which they were immured was a massive one, and there was no chance of forcing it.

The walls also of the room were of stone, and, in fact, there was no possibility of any egress except through the iron-bound portal.

He had reason for believing that he would be treated with revenge by Alfieri, the monk.

At length the little wicket was again opened, and a voice said:

"Alfieri is here."

"Let him come, then," said Jack; "I am awaiting him with anxiety."

"Deliver up your arms, then," was the reply, "and he will be with you instantly."

"No," replied Jack; "the Signor Alfieri has no need to be in fear of me. I shall not deliver up my arms to any one. I am no assassin, that he need dread to trust me. I am an English officer."

And very proudly our hero said the words.

"It is not that," said the old man. "He has his reasons, and he says that you will remain in this room until you consent to do his bidding."

"Be it so, then," said Jack; "he will find yet that he is playing a dangerous game."

The priest made no reply.

The little opening in the door was closed once more, and Jack and Juanita were again left to themselves.

Jack knew now that they were in deadly peril. But he kept up his courage.

"Fear not, Juanita," he said; "my friends will not desert me."

Meanwhile Ben Brace and the others made the most of their way towards the harbor of Benvenuto.

Not for one moment did crafty old Ben think that Jack had sent him off to the captain of the ship without a dispatch or anything to vouch for the truth of his statement.

He guessed at once that our hero had been led into a trap.

Of what nature he did not pause to consider.

He had a most resolute disbelief in the goodness of the Italian character.

He regarded all Italians as brigands and pirates, and crafty, subtle villains.

This was a very sweeping conclusion, no doubt, but it must be remembered that all those of the Italian nation whom the old tar had been brought in contact with had been, without exception, ruffians of the deepest dye.

He did not hesitate a moment, therefore, when the priest brought him the supposed message from Jack.

"It's no use remaining here," was his argument; "we can do nothing in the way of saving him by stopping in this building. There's too many traps about to please me. We'll come back with something that will blow down the old walls, and make 'em give the lad and the girl up. Yes, we'll do it if we have to knock every stone out of the monastery."

So off he went, at the head of his men, to the harbor.

The captain of the vessel to whom he applied for aid for Jack and Juanita was one of the regular old bluff sort—a fire-eater of the most approved style, and when he heard the circumstances there was not the slightest hesitation in his mind.

He at once told off a number of marines, and they were marched up at once towards St. Antonio under the command of the second lieutenant.

It would not have been possible—as Ben Brace had thought and suggested—to take up a ship's gun to blow down the old walls, for the roads were far too rocky and difficult to allow the passage of such a lumbering piece of ordnance.

But there was a small cannon standing on the quay, and this was at once requisitioned, and, with two mules attached to it, was soon being dragged up the hills.

On arriving opposite the great gates—the outer ones, of stone and iron—the big bell was sounded, and after a short delay one of the friars replied to the summons.

He appeared astonished at the appearance of the armed force.

But he quickly recovered his composure and asked the meaning of their coming.

"You have detained here, against their will, an English officer and his friend," replied Lieutenant Hutchings, "and we are here to take them with us."

There was no mistaking his manner.

That said plainly—

"If you do not give them up quietly, we shall take them."

The priest hesitated.

"I dare not admit you without speaking to the superior," he said; "it is as much as my life is worth. But I will go at once with your message."

He was not absent long.

But his answer was by no means a satisfactory one.

"The superior says that those whom you seek have left the place long ago, and he knows nothing of their whereabouts."

"Then we must enter and search the place," said the lieutenant. "Those are my orders, and I will fulfill them if I have to lay the place in ruins."

Again the priest passed into the building.

Again he came out with an evasive answer.

But the lieutenant would no longer wait.

He knew what in this case was the danger of delay.

"I must do my duty, since you seem inclined to oppose me," he said.

Turning to his men, he gave a rapid order, and without further hesitation they began with axes to break open the gates.

The cannon was placed in position, and as the priest fled across the court-yard, some men were sent round to watch the rear of the building, so as to intercept any fugitives.

There was a loud roar, and then a tremendous crash, and one of the stone pillars of the gates was shattered into a thousand fragments.

Lieutenant Hutchings thought naturally that this would be enough to explain to the superior of the monastery that he would stand no further nonsense.

But it was not.

No.

The place remained buried in silence.

Not a sound came from anywhere.

The word was given again.

The other pillar was shattered, so that the gate fell with a crash.

Then the attacking party passed into the yard.

"Ha!" exclaimed Ben Brace, "there's that old priest looking through a hole in the door. Shall I tell him, sir, that we will hang every one of them if they resist and don't deliver up our young English officer at once?"

"Yes—do so."

Ben Brace rushed to the opening.

"I say, old man," he cried.

Alfieri himself took the place of the other priest.

He understood English, as we know.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

"I've a message from my officer."

"Give it quickly, then."

"If you don't be quick and open the door, we will knock the whole building down about your ears, and hang every priest in the place," cried Ben.

"Take my answer, then!"

Bang!

Before Ben could see what he had to avoid, the treacherous wretch had fired through the hole in the door.

Ben staggered back.

The bullet had wounded him in the shoulder.

"Ah!" he cried, "traitor! You will pay for this."

"And," shouted Alfieri, "if you do not withdraw your men, we will burn Lieutenant Gale and his companion alive before your eyes."

"And we," said Ben, "will hang every one of your vile crew. Villains, you shall not escape with life!"

He rushed back at once to tell the failure of his mission.

Lieutenant Hutchings looked very stern.

"Guns, make ready!" he cried. "Burst open that door."

Again a roar and a blinding flame, and a cannon ball went crashing through the doorway.

Another, and it was shattered, but just as this happened and the relieving party were preparing to rush in, there was a sudden fusillade from the battlements, and looking up, they saw about a hundred priests—or men dressed as such—armed with muskets.

"Storm the place!" roared Hutchings. "Priests or brigands, we'll conquer them!"

He had only twenty-five men, but he paused not to think of that.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

UNEXPECTED AID—THE STORMING OF THE MONASTERY—THE BANQUET—THE RELEASE OF THE NUNS—A SECOND BATTLE.

AID was, however, coming to Jack's friends from a quarter where they certainly expected it least.

When the twenty-five marines came off their ship, to be marched up the hill under the command of Lieut. Hutchings, some of their comrades and sailors who had aided in their disembarkation remained on the quay for awhile, to watch the departure of their comrades, and to partake, moreover, of some stimulant stronger than water.

As a knot of them were standing outside a wine shop, they observed a tall, in fact a gigantic, man, of handsome face and noble mien, who stood not far off, eying them curiously.

He was habited in the ordinary uniform of an Italian captain in the merchant service, but when he spoke to them it was clear English without an accent.

It was, in fact, none else than Ralph Howard, the pirate.

Since Jack Gale had seen him last he had changed greatly.

His vision of going to England and retiring altogether from the desperate life he had led had vanished into thin air.

He knew by the flight of Lydia and Emily that all along there had been but a hollow truce; that they had seized upon the very first opportunity of escaping from his power; and that, wealth or no wealth, all hope of having Lydia as his wife, except by force, was the mere mad dream of a vain man.

Since that night when Lydia and her sister had escaped from one trap only to fall headlong into a worse, a long time had elapsed.

He had lost all clew to the two girls.

Leoni, too, had not crossed his path.

Where, then, had they gone?

Norman, he thought, must be a traitor, for he knew that his dead body had been found at the point where the two girls had disappeared.

Then, again, he would return to his original idea that somehow or another Leoni had again got the girls into his possession.

He fancied, however, that amid the crowd of men who turned up from the quay, and took the road straight through the town towards the hills, he recognized Ben Brace and Tom Meadows, and he hastened at once to inquire.

"Have you a sailor among your comrades who have just left you named Ben Brace?" he asked.

"Yes, there be a chap named that," said a marine; "he's no shipmate of ours, but our men have gone up to a convent where some friend of his is in trouble."

"In luck's way," thought Ralph; "either they've saved Lydia long since, and they've gone up for a last revenge on Leoni, or they're after her again and Jack Gale's in trouble."

He quickly replied:

"Ah, I thought I knew him. His friends are my friends; I'll give them a help. We've sailed together and fought side by side, and hang me if he's going up the hill with only twenty-five men. I'll get another five-and-twenty together in a trice, and help him."

A murmur of satisfaction passed through the little group as they heard those words, and saw the giant buccaneer stride across to a spot where some of his men were standing carelessly chatting.

It was a mere matter of minutes before the five-and-twenty men, armed to the teeth, were ready, and amid cheers from the marines hastened off in the direction of the convent, the name of which Ralph had extracted from one of the men.

They arrived there after the attack had begun, and the storming had been ordered by Lieutenant Hutchings.

Gladly the English officer took advantage of the aid offered him, when explanations had been entered into by Ralph Howard.

Not that the English band had relaxed their exertions or dreamt of yielding.

The appearance of the body of monks on the ramparts armed with muskets had had no effect upon the English force under Lieutenant Hutchings.

"We must blow the place down about their ears," he said.

But the arrival of Ralph of course put a new complexion on matters.

The gun was again loaded, and aimed at the inner gate, which was dashed open with a tre-

mendous sound, while volley after volley from the priests was poured in upon the little band.

Presently, after a second discharge had forced a large opening, the reinforced made a sudden dash, and in a few moments were in the hall of the monastery.

The monks were prepared for them.

Headed by Alfieri, they collected in numbers in the vestibule and on the staircases, and with their garments tucked up so as not to interfere with their actions made a desperate resistance.

But the resolute little band of heroes proved too much for them.

Sword to sword, pistol to pistol, monks, in spite of their courage, were no match for the trained men, and they were little by little, but surely, driven back.

It was Alfieri himself whom Ben Brace made an attack upon, for Ralph Howard did not seem to regard him as a foeman worthy of his steel.

He was desirous either of taking the priest prisoner, or of so marking him that he would be easily recognized at any place or time.

Alfieri in the first part of the battle did not shirk the combat, and in fact he fought with a skill and a bravery which showed that he was no stranger to the use of the sword.

But when he saw that his friends were losing the day, and that to remain meant to be inevitably captured, he gradually drew back.

He was followed hotly by Ben Brace, the daring old tar cutting and slashing his way through the ranks of the priests in such a manner that few who came anywhere near his cutlass could have escaped uninjured.

By his side fought Tom Meadows, who conducted himself in a brilliant fashion, which would have delighted the heart of Jack could he have seen him.

But Alfieri had no notion of being made a prisoner.

He saw that the day was being lost by his party, and gradually withdrew to the rear.

Then, taking advantage of an interval of confusion, as the priests were speaking of surrender, he turned and fled.

But he did not escape the avenging blade of Ben Brace.

Just as he turned the cutlass was raised, and descending, caught Alfieri on the forehead, inflicting a fearful gash.

The next moment the priest, with a howl of rage, rushed through a door in the rear and fled into the grounds.

Ben Brace made one dash after him.

But it was in vain.

As he leaped forward, the door was slammed in his face, and he was left among the struggling mass of priests.

By the time that the door was burst open Alfieri had disappeared.

They wasted no time in endeavoring to find him.

Ben knew that he had marked him for life.

The other priests having surrendered at once, as soon as they had lost their leader, search was immediately made for Jack, whose place of confinement was still a matter of uncertainty.

The old gate-keeper, however, soon solved the difficulty, and it was not long before Jack and Juanita were rescued from the little room, faint and weary with fasting and watching.

A loud and ringing cheer greeted their appearance, but Juanita turned ill when she saw the blood-stains on the floor, and the forms of wounded men lying about, being attended to by their companions.

"Let us get away from this as soon as possible," said the young girl, trembling. "I cannot bear these sights. They turn my blood."

"We will not delay a moment," said Jack—"not, at least, longer than will give the men time to see to their weary and wounded comrades. Let me speak to these priestly warriors, and get some necessary refreshment for our men."

"Hutchings," he said as he gripped the lieutenant by the hand, "you have had a severe tussle for it, and I and my companion are deeply grateful to you. It is my opinion that we should have been starved to death if you had not rescued us. They are a revengeful lot."

It was at this moment Ralph Howard approached.

"Well, Lieutenant Gale, we meet again," he said, "under stranger circumstances than ever."

"Ah, and you owe this gentleman a deep debt of gratitude, lieutenant," said Lieutenant Hutchings. "He and his men volunteered their aid, and good aid indeed it was."

"I give you my best thanks, Howard," said Jack Gale, holding out his hand. "I have long wished to find you. Do you know aught of Lydia Harden and her sister?"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Howard. "Is it true, then, that they are again with Leon?"

"So it seems, from a dying man's confession," replied Jack.

"But what does it all mean! Why are you placed here at all?" asked Hutchings.

"Ah, that is a story too long to tell now," said Jack. "I want to make these fellows disgorge some of their wines for our fellows. They need it."

Jack was the only one among the whole company who understood Italian, except Ralph and his men, who kept aloof.

In those days, when George III. was king, the education of an English gentleman very rarely included such a thing as Italian, and so Hutchings was quite at a loss to understand what was going on.

"I am glad there is some one here who can speak to these vagabonds," he said. "Pray make them 'disgorge,' as you say, at once, for I am as faint and weary as the rest."

The priests made no objection.

Their sudden attempt at soldiering had proved a most disastrous failure in the face of the resistance of a handful of brave men, and accordingly they were exceedingly docile.

In a short space of time, consequently, they brought out a quantity of wine and provisions of various kinds, which was served in a large room away from the scene of conflict, and though the comestibles were rather too highly oiled to suit the tastes of the English sailors, they were devoured on this occasion with extreme relish.

Half an hour's rest was indulged in, a kind of conveyance made for the wounded, and the one man who had lost his life in the combat, and then they were about to begin their return journey to the harbor, when Ralph the Avenger said:

"Are you sure, Jack Gale, that there are no women in this place?"

"It seems not."

"Have you made a thorough search?"

"No."

"And do they not know that you are in search of any ladies?" asked Howard.

"No."

"Then we have our work to do yet," said the pirate. "There has been no search made through the cells."

"But they are all inhabited by men," replied our hero.

"Ay, that may be; yet Heaven only knows the infamies of these monasteries," said Howard.

"But there is another wing, which, when any danger threatens any other convent, is always appropriated to fugitives and so forth. I shall commence a search if you do not."

"We will post our men in the best positions," said Jack, "we can secure, and then, with a dozen picked men, we can go through the monastery cell by cell."

So it was arranged.

The monks looked on in rage; and when it was announced by Jack and Ralph that they were about to institute a cell-to-cell visitation, many a cheek among the grizzly crew blanched with vexation and terror.

But there was no resistance to be made.

And so the search commenced.

The search party divided itself into four different parts, Ben Brace and Tom Meadows heading one.

It was one of the narrowest, darkest, and gloomiest of corridors that fell to their lot to search.

Along this the priest who acted as their guide led the way as swiftly as possible, opening the doors of the cells as little as he could.

But Ben Brace was not to be put off in this manner.

He took the lantern from the priest's hand when he found him inclined to be shifty, and searched every nook and corner in the cells himself.

At length, when they approached the farthest end of the corridor, the priest paused.

"There are no more cells inhabited," he said, in English.

"Inhabited! Shiver my timbers," cried Ben, "we haven't found one inhabited yet."

"No; these are the monks' cells," said the priest. "We will retrace our steps and search another corridor."

But at this moment Tom Meadows heard, or fancied he heard, a smothered cry.

"Stop, Ben!" he exclaimed, catching his companion by the arm. "We are being deceived!"

"What do you mean?"

"Listen, and you will know at once," replied Tom.

In another instant a second cry was heard.

"Help—this way! Help!"

"English, by Jupiter! No Italian twang there!" cried Ben. "I say, old copper-face, you've been a-deceiving of us. Come, no nonsense, or I shall put a bit of this through ye."

Ben took his pistol from his belt as he spoke, and leveled it at the priest's head.

The monk did not approve of this.

"I—I have made a mistake," he said. "I was given my information by a brother priest. I can hear sounds myself. Let us see."

Compelled to his task by the sight of Ben's pistol, the man now behaved with alacrity.

The sounds were found to proceed from a cell at the very extreme end of the corridor, and when the door was opened, a curious scene presented itself.

In the center of the room—if room it could be called—stood two women clasped in each other's arms.

The one was a girl of about nineteen years of age, *petite* and pretty, with a face which would have been piquant and winning, had it not been for the pallor which overspread it, and the look of care and eager despair upon it.

The other was a woman about eight-and-thirty, tall, and somewhat masculine, with some traces of good looks.

The two glanced only once at Ben Brace and his companions, and then the tall woman, with one bound, had leaped to the Jack Tar's side, and nestled to his breast.

"One of England's heroes—a true British sailor!" she cried, with an hysterical air. "Dora, Dora, we are saved!"

Dora, as the girl seemed to be called, had flown to the side of Tom Meadows, who was nothing loath to encircle her with his protecting arm.

"Bless my soul, ma'am!" cried Ben Brace, holding on to the portly form of the one who sought his protection, "who'd 'a thought of finding two English females shut up here in this horrid place? Why, it ain't good enough for a cat or a dog."

"And only think of being saved by a true British sailor!" sighed the lady. "Sailors are indeed brave."

"Shiver my timbers, ma'am," said Ben, "I wonder then as we find you among these 'ere shaven old hypocrites."

The lady sighed deeply, and leaned more heavily on Ben Brace's manly form.

"Ah!" she said, "that is a long and weary story, which I must tell you another time. Now, as you have saved me from these heathens, let me entreat you to let me breathe as soon as possible the sweet pure air of Heaven."

"Um!" muttered Ben, "given to potery or some such thing as that. Better shut her up at once. Ho, there—I say, don't choke me, ma'am! Avast there!"

The exclamation was caused by a sudden action on the lady's part, which completely put him "off his bearings," as he said.

The priest, who had so unwillingly taken them to the cell where the two women were confined, had made a movement as if to approach her, and suddenly the tall party had clasped Ben convulsively round the neck, exclaiming:

"Oh, save me! save me! That horrid man approaches!"

Tom Meadows, whose arm still encircled the young girl's waist, was whispering all kinds of comfort in her ear.

She needed it sorely.

Different in her style of nature from the woman with whom she had come in contact through the pressure of misfortune, she had been collapsed through her troubles, and was now overwhelmed by her sudden rescue.

A little drop of wine administered to her (to the priest's horror) from Tom's friendly flask, soon, however, succeeded in restoring her spirits, and she was able after a few moments to quit the spot with her companions.

The rescue of these two women was the only useful result of the search in the cells.

Many nuns were found.

Some were pleased at their release; some shrunk in holy horror at the touch of Protestant hands.

But no trace of Lydia and Emily were to be seen.

After all, therefore, the expedition, with its delay and its loss of life, was a failure, except in so far as the rescue of Jack and Juanita were concerned.

When those of the nuns who had expressed their wish to depart from the scene of their miseries were collected together in a room where they could partake of refreshments before proceeding to the town, Ben extracted from the two women he had saved some details of their history.

The elder woman, it seemed, was named Lucy Trimmins.

She had, at the age of twenty, been engaged to a "true British sailor," a young and daring spirit, who had commenced life by running away from home and getting aboard a merchant vessel.

His wickedness was rewarded by a rapid rise in the service, and when she was twenty-five he came homewards to claim her.

But on the way his vessel was lost, and "her own true British sailor-boy" was drowned.

During his absence she had been left a snug little property of her own, bringing in some hundred a year, and she resolved to give up the rest of her life to maidenhood and deeds of charity.

In this idea she was aided greatly by a Catholic priest, who finally persuaded her to enter a convent.

She soon began to pine for liberty, however, and when she desired to quit the place she was forbidden.

The only comfort to her during the last year of her dreary sojourn was the company of Dora Daly, a young Irish girl of very good family, who had been placed in the convent against her will, and who, when she escaped now from the life she hated, would be utterly discarded by all who knew her.

"You don't know," said the gushing Lucy, as she placed her white hand on the brown one of the sailor, "how much I have yearned for liberty."

Ben Brace, as my readers have doubtless seen, was no fool.

He was, in fact, always alive to business.

He had felt at first considerably put out at the very gushing demonstrations of affection displayed by Lucy Trimmings, but he was greatly mollified by the fact of the fair one having some property.

Like many others of his profession, he had an eye to the future, and was anxious, when war's alarms were over, to settle down in a quiet little business, if he had only "one leg to stand on."

He glanced at Miss Trimmings.

She was a fine woman, with a good figure, a bright eye, and a soft voice, and—she had a hundred a year of her own.

It was not to be sneezed at.

"Well, ma'am," he said, "seeing as I'm a humble Jack Tar—"

"Oh, I love Jack Tars!" murmured Lucy, with a decided pressure on the brown hand.

"And seeing as I've not had the chance of doin' such a service afore to a lady, I'm grateful to think I've been able to help you."

"And I—oh! grateful isn't the word to express my feelings!" exclaimed Lucy, with another pressure. "I shall always love sailors!"

A comical look in the eyes of Jack Gale at this moment caused Ben to flush furiously.

He rose up suddenly.

"Well, ma'am—"

"Call me Lucy."

"Well, Miss Lucy, I'm as pleased as can be to think I've helped you," he said, with a smile, "but I see the lieutenant's given me the hint to be off; so we'd better be making sail."

"What do you mean?"

"We must go," said Ben Brace. "We mustn't stop here all day. We're on duty, and only attacked this place 'cos they put our officer in a cell. Have you any one you'd like to go to?"

Lucy Trimmings raised her hands in dismay.

"Any one I'd like to go to?" she cried. "Why, I haven't a friend in the world! Oh, pray don't leave. Take me on board your ship!"

Lucy Trimmings on board the *Tormentor*—in nun's dress!

This was too good.

"Why, she'd be clambering up the yardarm after me," thought Ben.

So he resolved to temporize, keeping the hundred a year, however, well in view.

"Well, I'll ask the captain's permission," he said. "We're on the march now."

And so in a few minutes they were, Lucy Trimmings and Dora Daly with them, and several of the nuns.

A very different interview had taken place between Dora and Tom.

The latter's susceptible heart had at once been taken by storm by the beauty and innocence of the young girl.

Tom had never been in love, and Dora seemed to represent to him all that was good and beautiful in womankind.

Her plaintive little story struck at his feelings at once, and when on the road she said with a deep sigh:

"I have not a friend in the world, or any one who would even recognize me."

He squeezed her little hand, and answered:

"Come, Miss Daly, don't say that. While I'm alive you have a friend. We sailors are quick sort of chaps, and we fall in love all of a hurry, so if when the war is over you like to marry a farmer's son, I'll be bound I'll make you a good husband."

Dora smiled, not unpleasantly, or in an annoyed way, over her companion's words.

"We will see some day," she said; "but now

the first thing to be done is to find a home, and I have none."

"Have you no money?"

"Not a centissimo."

"That can soon be remedied," cried Tom, gayly. "Sailors don't want money aboard ship, so I can lend you my purse. But your friend, Lucy Trimmings, is coming on board our vessel, I believe. You had better come too."

"What could we do on board a man-of-war?" said Dora. "We should only be terribly in the way."

"But I don't think, after your escape from the priests, it would be as well to remain ashore."

"It would certainly be right to go," said Dora; "but—"

"But what, my dear?"

"I don't know whether I could stand the voyage," replied the young girl. "After all I have suffered, I should be afraid to be on board a man-of-war, which, according to what your friend says, is on active service."

"No, no, that would never do," replied Tom. "I can well understand that. But we shall most probably be able to put you on board a homeward-bound vessel, so that you could soon be on your way to dear old England."

"We should not meet again, then, perhaps?"

"Perhaps not," said Tom, gloomily.

His heart, as yet untouched by female beauty, was utterly taken by storm by this lovely girl.

But he had no notion of losing her.

"If I am to be killed in action," he said, "there's no use talking of meeting again; but if all goes right, and you and Miss Trimmings go to some place and leave your address for us, I'll be there with Ben Brace like a flash of lightning, when the war's over."

Thus talking, they reached the harbor.

By the time they had arrived at this spot, they found that the troops sent to the assistance of Cameron were already there, and in the course of an hour they had set sail, Miss Trimmings and Dora being allowed to come aboard on conditions.

It was with a heavy heart, indeed, that Jack saw the shore receding from his view.

He had made one more effort to find Emily.

He had failed, and duty called him away.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE "TORMENTOR" STARTS ON A CRUISE—A STERN CHASE.

It would be beyond the purpose of our story if we were to pause now to describe the operation of the expedition which was sent to the relief of Colonel Cameron.

Our hero certainly accompanied it, and was in the midst of as sharp a tussle as he had ever seen.

But we have to follow more closely the thread of our narrative, and to proceed quickly in the footsteps of Jack Gale in his pursuit of his enemies, and the two unfortunate girls whom he had sworn to rescue or avenge.

We briefly, therefore, state the fact that the expedition was eminently successful; that Jack acquitted himself, as usual, with gallantry and discretion; and that, considering the number and the desperate character of the enemy, there was but slight comparative loss.

In eight days after, all was busy on board the *Tormentor*.

The ship had, during the time of her being in port, received a thorough doing up, and now, being overhauled again, she was getting ready for sea once more.

During the short time that the *Tormentor* had been on its cruise, Ben Brace had suffered a good deal from another kind of tormentor.

No other than Lucy Trimmings, the lady he had rescued from the monks.

She didn't absolutely, as he had prophesied, follow him up to the yardarm, but she was after him everywhere.

On the least possible opportunity she was at his side.

She was nervous, she said, among such a lot of rough men.

"Including me, ma'am!" cried Ben Brace.

"No—no; you—you are an exception, Ben"—she had at once insisted upon calling him by his Christian name—"you are my *beau idéal* of a sailor. But the others are—"

"All true British sailors, ma'am," returned Ben. "I always sticks up for my comrades, as in duty bound."

But despite these little passages of arms, Ben and Lucy became very loving; and when the Cameron affair was over, it was decided that she was to go to England, taking Dora with her, and wait with the young girl at Petherberton, a village well known to her, and not far from the home of Tom Meadows.

The bluff sailor had no part in the relief party sent to Cameron.

Consequently he had a few days to devote to his innamorata.

And the couple, with Tom Meadows and Dora, went ashore to see what was to be seen, and had a thorough good time of it.

Both the ladies were now, of course, "rigged out" in orthodox fashion.

The nun's habit had been discarded with the miserable life they had left behind them.

At length the time came when the two rescued ones were to give up the pleasant society of their newly-found friends for a time.

They were not so foolish as to refuse the gold which was pressed upon them by the two sailors.

Dora Daly took hers from Tom in a kind of childish way, as if circumstances had made her dependent on him.

Miss Lucy Trimmings accepted hers with many a blush, and clasped Ben round the neck and kissed him, a performance which Ben did not in the least object to, only that several of the crew were looking on.

And then, when Jack Gale came home triumphant from the relief of Cameron, a bumping sum was made up for the two ladies, which our hero himself presented to them as a "tribute of respect from the officers and crew."

And, so half rejoicing, half sorry to leave so many tried friends, the two ladies were presently put aboard the good ship *London City*, bound for the port of that name.

The sailors manned the rigging and gave them a cheer as they went off.

When they were gone Ben Brace was observed to be decidedly down in the mouth.

"Why, Ben," cried Jack, "you've lost all your spirits."

"No, Master Jack," said Ben, "but I've lost a good woman. I've only known her a few days, but if she isn't Mrs. Brace, if ever I get back sound and well, hang me for a deserter."

"And you, Tom?"

"Dora has promised already," replied Tom.

Ben stopped aghast, and rolled the quid in his mouth frantically about.

"You young shark!" he cried. "To think that I, after all these years—but never mind! It's always the same. The youngsters get all the promotion in the service!"

And with a mischievous look at Jack Gale, he rolled away.

It was understood that the next cruise was to be in the Adriatic, in search of a large French merchantman, under convoy of a man-of-war.

So on the evening of the fourth day every stitch of canvas was spread, and the *Tormentor* left her anchorage, and sailed away out into the open sea.

Jack's heart was very heavy within him.

"Ben," he said, as he met the old tar in his walk to and fro on the deck on the night of their starting, "I've made up my mind to leave the service."

The old sailor regarded him in utter wonder.

"What, Master Jack!" he cried. "Leave the service? Why, you are only jesting, surely."

"No, I am not jesting at all, Ben."

"Well, I hope so, sir. The service wouldn't be the same to me if you weren't in it," said Ben.

"But why have you thought of such a thing, Master Jack?"

"Because my heart is not in my duty, Ben."

"Ah! I think I see it all now," said the sailor; "it's Miss Emily."

"You are right, Ben," said Jack; "my thoughts are always of her. Night and day I keep fretting because I am not able to go upon her track."

"Well, I dare say it is a worrit to you, sir," said the old tarr "but still ye see, sir, I've seen more of life than you, sir; and I'd never advise a man to give up everything in the world just because he's been disappointed like."

"Ah, that is not it," returned Jack; "you quite mistake me."

"What is it then?" said the old man.

"It is because I can never think of anything but the awful danger I left her in—her and her poor sister."

"Ah, I'm afraid it's just as I told Tom Meadows," said Ben, shaking his head.

"What was that?"

"Well, I don't like to say, sir."

"Oh, never mind; speak out, whatever it is."

"Well, sir, what I did say to Tom was that I thought it warn't any use your troubling about them two poor ladies any more, for they were most likely dead and buried long ago."

Jack flushed painfully.

"Ah!" he said, in tones of sorrow, "I have often thought the same, but I will never give way to despair."

"That's right enough, sir."

"Yes, until I know that these unfortunate girls

are either safe or dead I will never relinquish my search."

"It ain't likely," said Ben, "but still you must remember that you've got friends at home who are thinking of you, sir."

"True, Ben," said Jack. "But see yonder. What is that?"

Ben glanced in the direction pointed out by Jack as he leaned over the bulwarks and saw afar off on the ocean a large fixed light, and then another, the latter of which shot up high towards the heavens.

Then came another, and another.

"That is a signal," said Jack. "I had better tell the captain. Go, Ben, and say that I should like to see him on deck."

The captain was not long in making his appearance.

"That is a signal, certainly," he said, "and we had better steer towards it, and answer it, though it will be just as well to be careful, for these French fellows are deuced artful."

The *Tormentor* accordingly sent up three rockets, and shaped her course towards the stranger.

As she approached closer to the other vessel, the light which had been quivering and dancing on the waves was suddenly extinguished.

Then came a blaze, and a tremendous roar, and a cannon ball came crashing through the rigging.

"Ah! the treacherous hound!" shouted the captain. "Run out the carronade, and give 'em one. We'll fight the rascal, if he is twice our size!"

Rapid orders were given; and while a shot or two was sent skipping over the waters in the direction of the enemy, every stitch of canvas was spread to catch the steady breeze.

"Isn't it against orders to fight this ship, sir?" asked Jack.

"Confound the orders!" cried the captain, as he glanced at the men who were up aloft, repairing damages. "Do you think I'm going to run away when an enemy has sent a shot into me? No, no! The rascal sent up a signal of distress in order to mislead me, and, by Neptune! he shall pay for it!"

"He deserves it, sir, certainly," said Jack, "but hadn't we better put out our lights? We may get another unpleasant reminder in the shape of a shot if we do not."

"Certainly. Yes, Mr. Gale," said the captain; "we must keep a strict lookout, too, so that we shan't run into anything. It will be morning before we can venture to attack him."

It was a most tedious task waiting and watching for the dawn.

But the night was far too dark to enable the crew to do anything.

As they neared the stranger, they could only make out a dark mass in the water, but could tell nothing in regard to her size or rig.

A strict lookout was kept.

The sails were taken in, only enough being kept spread to enable the vessel to keep tacking, and Jack and Ben in the bows remained eagerly watching.

Apparently, however, the stranger was unwilling to attempt any further attack until morning, and so the silent night sped on.

CHAPTER L.

THE WRECK—AN UNEXPECTED CLEW TO OLD MYSTERIES.

At length the rosy tints of dawn began to creep over the waves.

All was then eagerness on board the *Tormentor*, for the men looked forward to these battles as the stepping-stones to fortune.

But as the light broke over the sea, a strange doubt came into the minds of those who kept watch on board the *Tormentor*.

The vessel near which they had been lying or tacking to and fro all night was a large merchantman.

Her masts were broken, her canvas lying by the board, her bowsprit smashed.

She was rolling helplessly, with apparently no one on board.

Jack's heart gave a leap as he beheld the scene. It had a most familiar look to his eyes.

It put him in mind of a scene long—long before, when the *Vulture* had come across a vessel lying helplessly in the trough of the sea; and when, boarding it, they had found a scene of horror and desolation.

A vision of Ernest Harden, bound to the mast with dainties spread before him, which he could not reach, came into his mind; and turning to Ben, he said:

"What does that remind you of?"

"The first ship we boarded after you joined the *Vulture*, sir."

"But this is not the ship that fired into us in the night. But here comes the captain."

The skipper hurried up to the side of our hero.

"What do you make of all this, Mr. Gale?"

"I think, sir, that last night when we saw the three rockets, they were a signal from this vessel when it was attacked by another."

"That's it," returned the captain; "no doubt the rascal, whoever he is, got away clear under cover of the night while we came up too late to be of service, and when those remaining on board were too exhausted to signal. They might all be dead for what appearance of life there is to be seen."

It must not be supposed that during all this time nothing was being done aboard the *Tormentor*.

The vessel was bearing rapidly down upon the wreck, for such it might well be called.

The boats were being got ready for the boarders.

Everything was being done as carefully and with as much precaution as if it was expected they would meet with an armed resistance on that silent ship.

Suddenly, as they were nearing the mysterious craft, there was a cry of—

"Sail, ho!"

"Where away?" cried the captain.

"To westward," answered Ben Brace.

And sure enough as the haze of the morning lifted from the sea, they could make out a vessel scudding away under full sail.

"That's the fellow we want," cried the captain eagerly; "and by Jove! he's going on our proper course. We must follow him."

The boats were soon after lowered, and with due caution the men crawled up on deck.

This presented a horrid spectacle, being covered with great patches of congealed blood.

Here and there lay three or four bodies huddled together where they had made a last stand.

It seemed at first that all on board were dead, but as they descended the companion, groans were heard, and then feeble cries of:

"Help—help!"

The footsteps of living beings had been heard by the poor wounded below, and had roused to their minds once more the dying embers of hope.

Directed by the sounds, Jack and his companions made their way down to the cabin, where they discovered several men lying bound and helpless, some of them too far gone to need any restraint.

A look of relief came over the faces of the wounded men as they saw the English uniform.

They knew at once that they were safe from brutality.

The captives were soon unbound, and some brandy from the captain's locker was administered to each.

They were all Italians, and they appeared delighted indeed when Jack addressed them in their native tongue.

There were four men in all, one being in the last stage of suffering.

It was evident, in fact, that he had not long to live.

However, he, as well as the others, were taken on board the *Tormentor*, and then a search was made throughout the vessel for papers and treasure.

The former were secured.

The latter had disappeared long since.

No time was lost in getting on board the *Tormentor* again.

Here a hurried consultation took place.

It was decided to leave the vessel where it was, for to take it in tow would be willfully to allow the enemy to escape, and to lose all chance too of making the capture which it was their special duty to achieve.

So the *Italia*, as it was called, was abandoned to the mercy of the waves, and the *Tormentor*, once more spreading its canvas to the wind, began the chase.

The *Italia* was a merchant vessel (as it seemed from the papers) from Genoa, bound to Alexandria with a rich cargo, and, from the accounts of the rescued men, they had been pursued by the French frigate almost immediately after leaving port.

The *Italia* was renowned as being a splendid sailer, and they made, therefore, a good fight for it.

But it could not stand against the sailing of the French vessel, and little by little the enemy gained upon it.

Then came the battle, in which the Italians fought a desperate fight, with the result that we have already seen.

"A very useless stoppage, except for humanity's sake," said the captain, as the *Tor-*

mentor once more plunged off over the rolling ocean.

"Yes," said Jack, musingly.

One of the faces of the men they had saved had raised a strange memory in his mind.

What it was he could not tell.

The man whose face had seemed so familiar to him came across the deck after a few moments.

He looked a ghastly object enough, with his head bound up with a white rag to hide a terrible gash on his forehead.

He did not look now quite the same as when Jack had first seen him lying in the hold.

But the man apparently had recognized, or fancied he had recognized him.

He made a bow, the grace of which would have done justice to a Spanish grandee, though his features bore the unmistakable stamp of a vagabond.

"Signor," he said, "is your name Jack Gale?"

"It is," replied Jack, with eagerness. "Do you know me, then?"

The Italian smiled.

"You see," he said, "that I am acquainted with your name."

"But where have we met?"

"Well," said the man, "in order to explain everything to your satisfaction, I shall have to make a confession."

"A confession," said Jack, almost joyously.

"Then I only know this, and this I beg of you to believe, that anything that you may confide to me will be utterly sacred."

The Italian furtively glanced round him.

"You need be under no fear," said the young lieutenant, "for I am the only one who understands Italian on board this ship, with the exception of your companions, who are below."

"My name is Jeromo Baldetti."

"Ah! I am almost inclined to think that I have heard that name."

"Yes, on board the *Wolf of the Waves*," cried the Italian, with a laugh. "If you did hear it, you must have heard it called out in the heat of battle."

"Very likely. But pray proceed. I am indeed all impatience."

"No doubt," said the Italian, "no doubt. And as I am on the eve of a confession, I may as well say at once that I belonged to the band of Leoni."

"Then was the ship we have just left—the *Italia*—belonging to the pirate?"

"No; I deserted."

"After the affair at Chios?"

"Yes."

"Then you know the fate of those unfortunate English ladies? Did they fall victims in any way to the villainy of Leoni?"

"No; at any rate, up to the time—a month ago—when I quitted his band forever."

"Where are they now, then?"

"In Italy," replied the man, "at the Convent of St. Christopher, near Genoa."

"But a dying comrade of yours told us that they were at San Angelo, and when we got there there was no sign of them," said Jack Gale. "How was that?"

"He was no doubt right as far as his knowledge went," said the man named Baldetti, "but Leoni only told that story for a blind. St. Antonio is a monastery, and only on rare occasions are women allowed within its walls. On these occasions they are placed in a separate wing. No, no! The ladies are at the Convent of St. Christopher, near Genoa."

"This man seems to speak the truth," thought Jack.

"Then he added aloud—

"And where is Leoni?"

"Ah!" said the Italian, with eyes that glittered with vengeful fire. "Ah! that is news which will please both you and me. The villain, Leoni, who struck me when I was wounded, and against whom I have sworn eternal vengeance, is on board yonder ship."

"The French ship we are chasing?"

"Yes."

"But what is he doing there? Is he a prisoner?"

"No; he is on board with several of his men—some twenty or more—who have joined the French in a piratical cruise."

"I am delighted to hear this," said Jack, "for at length I have a chance of meeting this villain face to face. You are sure?"

"Yes," said the Italian; "it was he who ordered the slaughter of our brave fellows. He would have had us all, living and dead, flung into the sea, had he had his way."

The chase had now begun in earnest.

The *Tormentor* was doing wonders, excelling herself in every way.

She was a ship that would stand any amount

of canvas, and now, as every sail was set, she was going at a spanking pace.

Jack told Ben and Tom quickly what he had heard.

"I shall ask to be put in command of the boats," he said to Ben.

And he did.

The captain hesitated.

Jack seemed always to be in for every perilous task.

But the glow on the face of the young sailor decided him.

"Yes," he said, "you shall have your wish."

Jack in his excitement shook the captain by the hand.

"Thanks, thanks, captain," he said; "I will get my crew ready at once. Now for Leoni the pirate and revenge!"

CHAPTER LI.

A FIGHT WITH A VENGEANCE—A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

It is almost impossible to describe the delight which filled the hearts of both Jack Gale and his friends when they thought that at last they were to meet Leoni face to face, on the deck of a vessel where he could not avoid them, where disguises (if he desired to resort to them) would avail him nothing, where they could force him and his companions to fight to the death and confess, as he hoped, the secret of the hiding-place of the unfortunate girls.

With a will, indeed, was it that the boats were rowed towards the enemy's ship.

The *Tormentor* meanwhile, of course, kept up an incessant shower of shot, to hold the foe employed.

But in spite of this, the crews of the boats were in terrible danger.

Huge shot every now and then plowed up the waves on every side of them, sending the water hurtling over the men, and threatening every moment to crush the small craft into pieces.

But so well were the enemy occupied by the splendid play of the *Tormentor's* gunners that it was impossible to work their guns so as to reach properly the little flotilla which approached daringly and steadily to attack them.

The French vessel was by no means remiss, however, in her manner of attacking the larger vessel.

As the *Tormentor*—which was by no means the heavier vessel of the two—bore down upon her, she sent broadside after broadside at her, doing considerable damage and lessening her speed greatly.

Neither showed any disposition to avoid the coming combat.

In this case, indeed, it was a case of Greek meeting Greek.

And meanwhile the boats crept on.

As they drew nearer they were greeted by a merciless volley of musketry, which could not fail to take effect.

Blood flowed among the desperate crew at last, and now, with a loud cheer of defiance, the brave British sailors pressed on even quicker.

Again and again, swifter and swifter, the guns of the *Tormentor* gave tongue, both vessels being worked admirably, but the best work being evidently done by the English.

Now the exciting moment was come.

The boats, in spite of their loss of men and the fierce attacks made upon them, drew up beneath the shadow of the great French frigate.

All hands were, of course, roused to repel boarders.

But up the English sailors swarmed.

Jack and Ben were the first to reach the deck.

They seemed to bear charmed lives.

Up the others followed, and soon their desperate gallantry had made a clear space round them, so that it was possible to see who were their opponents, and what was their next best move.

One thing at once delighted Jack's heart.

And this was, that among those who crowded round, the first person whom he recognized was Leoni the pirate.

All else was lost in this one long-expected meeting.

Regardless of everything else, Jack bounded forward.

His flashing sword was raised aloft in the bright morning sun.

"Ha, pirate villain!" he cried, "we meet at last. Look to yourself; it is your life or mine!"

With these words he took a leap across the space which intervened between him and Leoni, and their weapons crossed each other vengeancefully.

"Fool!" shouted Leoni. "Your death is near."

No one interfered with them.

As if by common accord, they were left to fight out their battle alone.

In fact, the others were so completely engaged in various ways that they had no time to look at any one but themselves.

The boarding party was a strong one, and a brave one, too.

Never, perhaps, had the French crew been assailed by a better and more resolute set of men.

The *Tormentor* had now, of course, to cease her firing for fear of killing her own sailors, and so she tacked round and came under full press of sail to the other side of the frigate.

The French saw now that they had stiff work before them.

The boarding party were cutting and slashing at the rigging, and disabling as much as they possibly could, and they could see by the tactics of those on board the English vessel that she meant business.

However, the French were not dismayed.

The ship was well manned, and with a veteran crew who had been used to hot work and were not afraid of it.

The first thing to be done was, of course, to get rid of the boarding party, and accordingly it was attacked on all sides violently, the object being to conquer them and drive them into the sea before the *Tormentor* closed upon the other side.

It was a terrible fight.

On both sides the men seemed reckless of their lives.

Leoni and Jack were still face to face.

But it was cut, thrust, parry everywhere on a deck slippery with blood.

The English held their own.

They knew that everything depended on their keeping on deck while the *Tormentor* came to their aid.

So, after the first onslaught, when the immense number of their opponents had put a stop to a free flight, they gathered in a hollow square, with its fourth side against the bulwarks, so that they could repel attacks on all sides.

Meanwhile Leoni and Jack had had a terrible duel.

In the first part of it our hero had succeeded in wounding the pirate severely.

Even as he did so, and hoped that the next stroke would be his death blow, he cried:

"Tell me where those unfortunate ladies are, before I take your wretched life."

Leoni laughed loudly as he parried Jack's next stroke.

"What has become of them, boy?" he cried.

"One has long since been my wife, the other is a slave in Turkey."

There was no time or opportunity for further speech.

The battle was now a general one, and it was only now and then that the two enemies could approach one another at all.

But the shaft had struck home.

Poor Lydia the wife of this villain, and Emily in the hands of some Turk!

The idea was so horrible and disgusting, that Jack's arm for the moment almost lost its power, and he fell back.

But the next instant he had sprung on his enemy again, and the battle was recommenced with three-fold vigor.

At length, after a terrific broadside had been sent into the *Tormentor* without making her pause in her course, the two vessels closed, the grappling irons were flung, the vessels were locked together in a deadly embrace, and an awful battle commenced.

Out there, on the silent sea, without a vessel in sight, it must be destruction to one or the other.

Or, perhaps, in this terrible fight both crews might drift away to death.

CHAPTER LII.

THE FIGHT CONTINUED—TOM MEADOWS DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF.

It would be quite impossible to describe now the combat that ensued.

But it was soon evident that between the two bodies of English the French would have to give in.

During the height of the contest an incident occurred which went far to damp the ardor of the enemy, and to bring on the end of the affray.

The French flag suddenly came down with a run.

And then being seized by a British tar, was doubled up into a ball and tossed on board the *Tormentor*.

The French looked upon this as a bad omen; and loud were their exclamations of rage at the sight.

How it was done had not been seen by many

but Jack and Captain Halstead, and it was indeed an act of coolness and daring.

In the midst of the hail of bullets, Tom Meadows had climbed up to where the French ensign flaunted in the breeze, and despite the shots aimed at him, had run it down.

A tremendous British cheer arose from the deck of the *Tormentor*.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Down with the Johnny Crapauds!"

"Up with the Union Jack!"

And sure enough, one brave old tar, more daring than the rest, clambered up with an English ensign, and in a few minutes it was fluttering gayly at the masthead.

Such a cheer as went up then, though the bold seaman fell desperately wounded to the deck!

No one thought of life or death then.

All their ideas were concentrated on the one idea:

The glory of old England!

"Do you surrender?" shouted Captain Halstead to the French officer, as the Gallic forces began to huddle together.

"We will die—we will not surrender!" said the French officer.

He did his best to rouse the flagging spirits of his men.

But the French are the worst sailors in the world for fighting a losing battle.

They do not mind desperate attacks; they think nothing of the deadly storm of bullets, as long as they can rush along towards victory.

Then, they take no notice of piles of dead or wounded, or comrades falling by their sides; but when they are driven back, they seem to be unable to recover.

The slightest show of dashing bravery on the part of their enemies is enough at this critical juncture to turn the scale against them.

It was just thus now.

The French captain was as brave as a lion.

So no doubt were his crew.

But in the first instance they had been disheartened by the fall of their flag.

And now they were further disheartened by the resolute bravery and dash of the English.

Presently, just at the moment when Leoni, wounded again by Jack Gale, fell under the feet of the other men and disappeared from view, Captain Halstead contrived to make his way to the side of the French leader.

Captain Montrouge, who, like the English commander, was seriously wounded, was nothing loath for the encounter.

If he could only succeed in cutting down his enemy, there might yet be a chance of retrieving the fortunes of the day.

But fate had decided against the French on this occasion.

Strive as they would, there seemed to be no chance for them against the brave British sailors.

And so presently Montrouge succumbed before the superior skill of the British commander, though he was as brave a man as ever trod a deck.

His last words, as he fell to the deck dead, from a thrust from the British captain's sword, were:

"Vive la France!"

Feebly—very feebly—were they responded to.

The French sailors were completely worn out, and at length, as they began to be cut down in helpless confusion, the fatal words were uttered on all sides:

"Quarter! quarter!"

"We surrender! we surrender!"

In an instant all hands were stayed.

The conquered quickly delivered up their arms, and soon the scene of slaughter was over.

The jubilant Britons took possession of the battered ship, and the prisoners were taken below and stowed away, although most of them were accepted as on parole.

Jack, as soon as all was over, commenced his search for Leoni.

He was not among those on deck.

Of that he soon assured himself.

He examined the face of every dead man ere he was heaved overboard, and that of every wounded man, too.

But he found not the pirate Leoni.

Ben Brace was with him in this search, with his arm in a sling from the terrific blow with a marine-spike.

"Have you looked among the living?" asked he. "He's like a cat—got nine lives. Only mind you look out. He's as vicious as a shark, and he'll make a dash for you if you ain't careful."

"Let him do so," said Jack; "I fear him not. Come along."

They hurried down as quickly as they could to the place where the prisoners were under strong guard.

Here the captives were disposed in groups, some standing up, some crouching down, some who were wounded badly lying at full length.

In vain he cast his eyes round him.

There was no Leoni to be seen.

He put the question to several of the prisoners.

But they knew nothing except that Leoni was among the crew; that he had been seen fighting desperately in the fray, and had then disappeared entirely.

Jack, however, was not the one to be satisfied with such an explanation as this.

He searched high and low, and was at last about to give up in despair, fancying that the pirate must have hidden away somewhere underneath the treasure bales which had been seized from the merchant vessel, when he caught sight of a priest clad in a long brown gaberdine and cowl.

He was bending over the wounded, and administering spiritual consolation to those who appeared to be in *extremis*.

Something familiar in this figure struck him, although the priest had his back turned.

Jack caught Ben by the arm.

"Ben," he said, in a low voice, "Ben, look yonder. Who is that?"

"Bless me! it's Alfieri the monk, as I'm a living man."

Ben spoke like one upon whom some light had suddenly dawned.

He glanced up at Jack with an inquiring look.

Jack saw it, and a light seemed to break upon him also.

"Yes, Ben," he said, "it is Alfieri. Come with me, and be cautious."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Jack approached quietly.

"A word with you, Alfieri," he cried suddenly.

The priest turned.

He had not seen Jack, and the familiar voice made him feel strange.

"Well met, Alfieri," said Jack. "I am here to seek Leoni."

"You will not find him."

"Why?"

"He is not here."

"I fought with him on deck."

The priest smiled.

"Ah," he said, "that may be, but he had provided against all things."

"Speak plainly," cried Jack, who had advanced now close to the priest, so that he could look straight into his eyes.

"I will explain," said Alfieri, with the air of a man who is brought to bay. "When I and Leoni came on board this ship, he made me promise that, in the event of his death, or of his being dangerously wounded, I would throw his body overboard. He was dangerously wounded by you, and I have thrown his body overboard, according to his last wish."

"Supposing I say that you speak falsely?" said Jack.

The priest shrugged his shoulders.

"You must keep your own opinion," he said.

"I shall not attempt to alter it. Stand aside! I have my work to do with the dying."

At this moment Tom Meadows and two of the crew of the *Tormentor* came down the ladder.

"Remain where you are," cried Jack, with a significant gesture, and drawing his sword; "there may be trouble here."

Tom and his companions drew their cutlasses.

Ben's was already in his hand.

"Alfieri," said Jack, boldly, "since I have been speaking to you a new idea has entered my brain. I feel that I have been a fool and a dupe; that I have sacrificed time and opportunities. I have treated you, as others have, as Alfieri the priest. But you are also Leoni, the Pirate of the Mediterranean, and Rinaldo, the Brigand of the Mountains! Three villains rolled in one!"

As he said this in a loud voice, he sprang suddenly forward, and made a snatch at the priest's beard.

As he anticipated, it came off in his hand, and revealed to all the well-known features of Leoni!

Pirate!

Brigand!

Priest!

All in one, he stood revealed at last!

What light was now thrown upon things which hitherto had been all darkness.

Jack could see, in one flash of thought, the fatal mistakes which had been made throughout.

But there was no time for deliberation now, it was time for action!

As the name, Leoni, sprang from many lips at once, the pirate, at bay now at last, drew a pistol which had been concealed by his priest's robe, and fired point-blank at our hero.

It was fortunate that Leoni was situated as he was.

If it had been an ordinary hand-to-hand en-

counter, the ball would have gone spinning through Jack's brain.

As it was his hand trembled, less with fear than rage, and the ball, instead of sending Jack to his last account, went hot and tearing through his shoulder.

It was excruciating pain, and Jack bit his lip in agony.

But in an instant he had sprung upon Leoni, and cut at him fiercely with his sword.

"Up, up, my friends!" shouted the baffled villain, as he drew his sword from his belt. "They would massacre the prisoners!"

The prisoners sprang up at once, muttering fiercely.

All the conversation between Jack and Leoni had been lost, as it had been in English, and the words which the pirate had used being in French, they responded at once to the call.

"Keep the way there, Tom," shouted Jack, "and one of you go on deck, and bring down force sufficient to quell this mutiny."

Then, springing back among the Frenchmen, he cried, in their native language:

"One moment, you are on parole. Hear me before you do as yonder villain bids you!"

The effect was instantaneous.

The prisoners had surrounded him, with sullen, savage looks, seeming as if, in default of having weapons, they would have torn him to pieces with their hands.

But, on being appealed to like this, they drew back and prepared to listen.

Ben and the others had precipitated themselves towards Leoni as Jack spoke, and the old tar had raised his pistol on a level with the pirate's head, and close to it.

It would have been instant death for the villain to move, and accordingly he stood with calm defiance, while Jack addressed the prisoners hurriedly, explaining to them roughly, and yet forcibly, the brutal cruelties to which he and his friends had been subjected by the pirate.

Leoni, the pirate, monk, and brigand—for indeed he had, by disguise, worked the three characters—saw that he was beaten.

"Be it so," he said, as he sheathed his sword; "so far, you have triumphed; but it is but a poor one. If you take my life, I shall die with my secret buried in my heart, and those you seek will be lost to you forever!"

"I," said Jack, "have nothing to do with your life or your death. They are in the hands of others. I have done my duty; that is enough for me."

As he spoke, those who had been summoned from the deck came down, and by Jack's orders Leoni was disarmed and taken before the captain.

The latter shook Jack by the hand.

"Well done, my boy," he said; "I am glad indeed to have helped you to secure the prize you wanted. It is to be hoped that we shall be able to force him to speak. Clap him in irons, Ben," he added, addressing the delighted old tar, "and put him down in the hold of the *Tormentor*."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Ben, with a grin, "it's about the best bit o' work I've ever had to do for years; I'll see he's safe, sir, and no mistake."

Leoni stood defiantly eying those around him. His eyes were flashing, his chest heaving with suppressed wrath.

Once or twice his glance rested on Jack, as if he would have sprang upon him, and torn him limb from limb.

Then his gaze rested for a moment on the softly rolling ocean, as if he would have leaped into its bosom and been at rest.

But these thoughts passed away in a moment. He laughed as he walked off, between a strong body of sailors, to the hold of the *Tormentor*.

"Ha! ha!" he cried; "you have overreached yourselves! You have conquered my body, but you cannot conquer my soul!"

"Jack," said Captain Halstead, when the pirate had gone, "I was going to put you in charge of the ship to run her into some friendly port, but I find that I should have been running you into Davy Jones' locker. It has had such a smashing up from the *Tormentor* that she won't be safe for more than a few hours. We shall have to bring all the prisoners aboard the old craft, and the treasure, and then we must scuttle this, and let her go down."

"It seems a pity," said Jack, as he glanced at the tall masts and the massive timbers of the stately ship, "that she can't be towed into some harbor, and fitted up to fight for old England."

"Ah, my boy," said Captain Halstead laughing, "you'll be a post captain soon enough. No, no, I can't spare you yet. It would be folly indeed to send you lumbering over the sea in this crazy old hulk, when I want you to help me in giving the other Frenchman a thrashing."

The captain's orders were soon carried out.

All the bales of goods and treasure were taken

on board the *Tormentor*, the prisoners likewise, and then the ship's carpenter went below to cut a big hole in her bottom.

Then the *Tormentor*, moved slowly away, and the *Imperieuse* began to settle down in the deep sea.

The English frigate had not, as we know, come scathless out of the fight.

Its canvas had been fairly riddled with shot and its timbers in places had been completely shattered, and it was soon seen that it would be quite impossible to go into action again, until repairs were done.

It was accordingly determined to run for the friendly port of Volo.

In order now to explain properly the circumstances attending the conclusion of our strange story, we must ask our readers to accompany us as we pass once more across the deep blue sea towards the sunny shores of Italy.

Some four miles from Naples, perched upon a high hill, from the summit of which could be obtained a view of the calm and blue waved ocean, stood a castellated building of some pretensions known as the White House.

It was of considerable architectural beauty; one part of it being built in a style resembling the ancient castles, and presenting the appearance of great age; the other having evidently been erected during the present century.

In fact, it seemed that the architect had availed himself of the still solid part of an old ruin and tacked on to it an erection of modern date.

It was known as what the French denominate a *Maison de Santé*, or lunatic asylum.

Here over a hundred wretched beings wandered about the grounds by day or played at various games in the big saloons.

Most of the inmates were perfectly harmless, and indeed some of them were of so ordinary an appearance, and so gentle and mild in manner, that it seemed strange that they should be in such a place at all.

Some, however, there were, an evilly disposed few, upon whom the eyes of the keepers were constantly set.

Men grave of aspect and long of beard, who went sternly to and fro, as if engaged upon some serious and even desperate business.

There was one in particular, on the evening on which we introduce the place to our readers, who appeared as if he were going off into a desperate state of madness.

He was a thin shadow of a man, who was known as the "pedestrian," for he would walk to and fro, to and fro, from one point to another, and round and round the different shrubberies and parterres—hurrying—hurrying as if his very dear life depended upon his haste.

This was his practice every day that he was out in the grounds; and people had ceased to take particular notice of his peculiarities, but on this occasion his ways were so strange that no one could avoid observing him.

He walked a long distance, then stopping, he would fling his hands aloft, and clap them forcibly against his brow.

Then this man, who had never spoken during the whole of his residence in the White House, uttered loud and discordant noises like a dumb person in agony attempting to speak.

This man, who attracted so much notice on this particular evening at the White House, was Ernest Harden, he who had been flung into the sea by the pirates.

CHAPTER LIII.

A MIND'S RESURRECTION.

THE keepers kept careful guard over Ernest Harden as they saw the sudden and unaccountable change in his demeanor.

"The English signor is going on in a wild manner indeed," said one of them, a young fellow named Antonio. "What are we to do with him?"

"Only watch him," said the other. "I've often seen people come to their right senses when they've acted like this. He'll either try and do a mischief to himself or to others, or else he'll calm down and recover."

"Then is his only brain fever, not madness at all," said Antonio.

"That is what I think," said the other. "At any rate, watch him. I should like to see him get better. He looked so brave and handsome when he was brought here from the madhouse at Reggio, and now—"

He shrugged his shoulders, and walked away to attend to other duties.

Antonio followed in the steps of Ernest, who, no longer wandering on, on, as I have said, kept pausing, and pressing his hand to his brow, as if he was trying to remember something.

Presently he ceased walking about altogether, and pausing by a little fish-pond in the center of the grounds, he, after a moment or two, sat down on a rustic seat.

Antonio watched him steadily, but he did not observe it.

His mind, or whatever there was left of it, was, as it were, struggling with itself; wrestling for the mastery against some unknown enemy.

He was in fact, as usual, lost to everything except his own trouble, even if he was able to understand that.

Presently his eyes fell suddenly upon the water of the little pond.

He started.

"Ha! the water!" he cried.

Then he rushed to its edge, and dabbled his hands in it, and after a moment, seeming, as it were, satisfied, he returned to his seat and sat down again.

Antonio had heard him in surprise.

He had spoken for the first time.

The young keeper resolved to improve the opportunity.

He sat down near him.

"Ah, sir," he said in English, for the attendants could speak other languages than their own—"ah, sir, I hope you are better. You have been ill a long time now."

"Ill?" muttered Ernest, glancing around him.

"Yes, very ill."

"Then where am I?"

The man hesitated.

"In the hospital," he said.

Ernest gazed round again.

He saw the men wandering round him; he saw their aimless movements, their vacant faces.

And then he guessed all.

Even his weakly-awakened mind grasped to a certain extent the full horror of the situation.

"Heavens!" he cried, "I have been mad, and am in the madhouse!"

"Calm yourself," said Antonio; "you are better far now."

Ernest did not speak for a moment.

He was utterly dazed.

His mind, in fact, was too weak to grasp any idea.

"Better—better? Ah, I remember," said he, at last. "Yes, I was cast into the ocean, and then I was placed in a dull, dark house, and—oh, Lydia, Lydia!"

And he burst into a passion of tears.

This was just as it should be.

Antonio did not attempt to stop him.

He let him weep on.

And then cautiously he left him, and hurried in to tell the doctor.

The latter was delighted.

He had no desire for more patients than he could help, and he naturally anticipated some reward if he succeeded in restoring him.

So he hurried to the spot.

He found Ernest very exhausted.

The fit of weeping was over, but he was still pale and anxious, with a wild, threatening look in his eyes.

"Ah, sir," he said, in a soothing tone, "I am glad to see you better. Take my arm, and let us go into the house. A little rest now, and all will be well."

The wretched man rose, staggeringly, and linked his arm in that of the doctor.

"Yes, I will go into the house," he said, "wherever that may be. I am weak and ill, and consequently should like to have some stimulant."

The doctor was astonished at the calm and quiet way he spoke.

There was no doubt that with care he would recover.

Slowly they entered the house.

Here the physician administered a gentle stimulant, with something in it also of a soporific nature, and it was not long before Ernest fell into a pleasant sleep.

When he awoke, in the early morning, he was very weak.

But his mind was right.

It was like a resurrection of the brain.

He remembered everything as clearly as possible, but he knew nothing, of course, of the long time which had elapsed between the time of the outrage upon him by the pirates and the present.

However, as he became stronger, the doctor told him all that had occurred, and Ernest explained everything which had happened to him, and the cause of his severe malady.

Until this moment, of course, the people of the White House knew nothing of his name.

"I suppose I have no money," said Ernest. "I expect they took all that from me at Reggio."

"I don't think you have a farthing," said the doctor.

"Have you a messenger whom you can send to Reggio?"

"Yes—Antonio, the keeper."

"He is trustworthy?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then I will send him to the bank at Reggio for some money," said Ernest. "I am as grateful as man could be for all that has been done for me; but, still, you must forgive me if I am anxious as I can be to get away from a madhouse."

"No doubt," said the doctor, smiling, "no doubt; but you must not run away from us just yet. We must get you a little stronger before you dream of moving."

"Must it be so?" said Ernest, sadly.

Illness had changed him.

He was no longer full of the headlong folly which had proved his ruin before.

He was calm and quiet, and willing to take advice from others.

"Well, I may truly say it must," said the doctor; "after your mind has so long been a blank—after, in fact, you have been so enfeebled in every way, you would find it too much of a strain upon you to quit this place at once. But you need not stop more than a week. Then you can go to a hotel near at hand, where I can visit you; and then, in two or three weeks more, you will be at liberty to go whithersoever you please."

"Ay," said Ernest, feebly, "in search of Lydia," and a smile of joy went over his face.

Then he set to wondering as to her probable fate.

He knew nothing, of course, of all the terrible scenes she had gone through.

He imagined naturally enough that she was in England by this time.

He little dreamed of her loss of sense, of her captivity, of the scenes in the volcanic islands, the terrors of the cave, of the earthquake at Chios—and the hundred accidents which had befallen her, her sister, and her friends.

He lost no time in sending off to the town of Reggio.

At the bank, he had been given up for lost.

But his well-known hand-writing stood him in good stead; and Antonio was not very long before he came back with the wished-for money.

It happened just as the doctor had prophesied.

A week's quiet in the bedroom, with occasional walks away from the other patients, resulted in Ernest's being able to go to the hotel, and in about three weeks he was able to take leave of the place, and make his journey homewards.

One thing he asked anxiously, as he shook hands with the doctor, for the last time—

"Are you sure, doctor," he said, "that I am quite cured? Is there any danger of my illness recurring?"

"No," replied the Italian, with a reassuring smile, "you need be under no apprehension of that. I would advise you to avoid all excitements which are unnecessary for a time, and you will be as strong as ever."

With this reassurance Ernest hastened off on his long journey to England, rightly imagining that he would be more likely to hear news of Jack and his doings there, than by dodging about the coasts of Italy, which seemed so full of danger to all connected with him.

CHAPTER LIV.

LEONI AND HIS CONFESSOR.

It was evident to Leoni as well as to those about him, after awhile, that in the event of his being kept long in confinement he would soon succumb to the effects of his wounds.

His proud spirit could ill brook the effects of confinement.

He refused to take nourishment, and the furious anger boiling in his veins caused his wounds to refuse to heal.

Weakness and the chafing of his mind would soon have destroyed his health, had there not been one by to tend him, and try to bring him into a better state of mind.

Juanita!

As they went on their lumbering way towards Volo, heavy with treasure and overburdened with men, she crept down one morning to his side.

The pirate was sitting in a corner, leaning against the beam to which he was chained; and he scowled at her as she entered.

In the dim, uncertain light he did not recognize her in her male attire.

She knelt by him.

"Leoni!" she said.

Her voice was very soft.

She had once loved this handsome demon.

He started.

"Whose voice is that?" he cried.

She laughed ripplingly.

"Do you not know it?" she said.

"I fancy I remember it," he answered; "but it was in the days long gone by."

"Ah! I was once loved, now forgotten," she said. "When you found that your rough ways and cruel talk frightened me, and that I turned from you to Bernardo, you swore to be avenged on me, and I fled from you in fear. But now I have come to help you, or rather to ask you to help yourself."

He laughed derisively.

"Help me? What help do I want when I am dying—dying as fast as I can?"

"You are only ill because you are here in captivity," said the young girl, "and because also you are fretting yourself, and will not eat."

"Why should I, when I am going like a lamb to the slaughter?" he sneered. "I am not one of those miserable animals who eat like gluttons an hour before they are executed."

"There is no such question, Leoni," said Juanita softly; "if you will but tell where these English ladies are, you will be treated with all leniency. I will guarantee your safety. I have done these English people a great service, and for my sake they will behave well to you. I will pledge myself that you shall be set free the very moment that you enable Jack Gale to find Lydia and her sister. And then, Leoni," she added in a softer voice still, "I will be your wife, as once you wished."

The pirate listened quietly.

This strange speech of Juanita's was a long one for her to make.

But it enabled him to think.

He glanced earnestly into her face as far as the dim light would allow him.

Was the girl deceiving him?

"What is it you want me to do?" he asked sullenly.

"To eat."

"I cannot in these irons."

"What promise will you make if I succeed in having you released from them?" asked the young girl.

"I am disarmed," he said; "let them remove these irons, and place a sentry at yonder door. That is enough, surely. They cannot be afraid of one man."

"And what if they do that?"

"I will take some refreshment, and have my wounds dressed, for your sake," said the pirate. "Perhaps when I have walked to and fro a bit, and got this infernal cramp out of my limbs, I shall be better."

"And you will tell me your secret?"

"I have not yet bargained for that," said Leoni. "I must know better what they are going to do with me first."

"I will go and see them!" said Juanita, eagerly.

And she darted away.

The pirate gazed after her with eyes which blazed anew with fury.

"Ha!" he cried. "She will go to him to plead my cause, not because she loves me, but because she loves him! Ha! ha! She thinks I do not understand her—do not know how women delight in sacrificing themselves for those whom they love. She would be content to be queen of the banditti, forsooth, that this English brat—this beardless boy—may recover his young betrothed."

The thought seemed to madden him, and he bit his lips till the blood came.

His hands too clenched vengefully together, as if he was longing to clutch the throat of some enemy.

"She thinks to deceive me with the pretty childish ways with which she won my heart in the long ago, when I frightened her by my rude speeches and my bold ways," he muttered. "No—no! But I must dissemble. Anything—anything will be better than this captivity."

"Once free," he thought, "then would be the time for action."

So ere she returned he had smoothed his face.

He was apparently dozing when she came back.

With the young girl came three men.

One was a marine with a musket, the sentry he had demanded.

The other two were Ben Brace and the ship's carpenter, who proceeded, without further to-do, to knock off his irons.

"So," said Juanita, who looked prettier than ever with her flushed cheeks and eager eyes. "See, I have kept my word."

"Ah!" said Leoni, as he was helped to his feet by Ben Brace, for his limbs were cramped by the irons, and he was weak from fasting. "Ah! I never doubted that. But I am giddy—give me—"

"Here, take this!" said Ben, and he thrust a bottle of rum into his hand; "drink hearty—it won't hurt ye. It's real Jamaiky."

Rum was not Leoni's favorite beverage: but the strong and wholesome navy-rum revived him in a moment, and seemed to course through his veins like wildfire.

"Thanks—many thanks!" he cried, pulling himself together quickly. "Go tell your captain I am grateful. Oh, what it is to be free!"

He paced to and fro, quicker than might have been expected, seeming to gain strength as he walked.

Then at a pleading look from Juanita, Ben Brace and the ship's carpenter quitted the place, leaving the sentry at the door.

She crept up to him and placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"Well, Leoni," she said, "have I done well? Have I performed my first promise?"

She looked bewitchingly, gently, even tenderly up to his face.

Who could tell what were her thoughts in that moment?

Who could tell that she was acting a part, a terrible part, be it said, sacrificing a life's happiness to secure happiness for another?

Even Leoni was for the moment deceived by her ways.

"Yes, you have done well," he said.

"And what is my reward?"

He placed his arm round her lissom waist and kissed her.

"That is my first reward," he said.

"And after?"

"Ah, we must see."

She spoke in a sprightly voice, and with a sprightly gesture, in order to hide the shudder which ran through her frame at his touch.

"And now," she said, "I will go and get you a meal. Then while you eat we must talk, and you must tell me how to find these people. Then you will be set free, I will become your wife, and we can return together to Italy."

The miscreant had long before this made up his mind what to do.

One act of deceit more or less in a career of crime mattered not to him.

So when presently she returned to him with a meal he smiled upon her and said:

"I have made up my mind to tell all as soon as I land safely on *terra firma*. I will explain to the young Englishman everything."

"But you have said that the lady, Lydia, is your wife," said Juanita.

The Italian shrugged his shoulders.

"Basta!" he cried, laughing, "that was said in the heat of the moment, when eyes were looking death into other eyes, and sword was clashing against sword. Ah, that is a different thing! No; she is safe and well I hope, and that is why I was going to her."

"Where is she, then?"

"At Volo."

Juanita smiled.

"Ah, then, fate is wafting us to the very spot," she said.

"Yes; fate or the devil," he murmured to himself.

"Whereabouts in Volo are they to be found?" pursued Juanita, winding her arms round his neck.

"Ah, my little confessor," he said, "you want to know too much at once. I shall begin to believe that you are deceiving me."

"No; I am anxious for it to be all over, that I may see you free, and that we may return to Italy together."

"Ah!" thought Leoni, "that is far from your thoughts, my pretty one."

Then he added aloud—

"You must not try and catch me, my sweet. No—no! Fair is fair. I have promised that I will give all necessary information when I land. Now I keep it back—for my own safety."

And so they went on talking, until it was time for Juanita to go on deck as she had promised.

When Leoni was left alone his anger vented itself in rapid strides to and fro, for food and drink had revived his failing strength, and the ship's surgeon—as we have omitted to say—had tended his wounds and cooled their burning heat.

PRESENTLY, however, he flung himself into a corner.

There he saw something which gave him hope.

It was a huge auger.

Instantly a hideous thought sprang into his brain.

"Ah, here is a famous chance to escape" he thought. "It only requires a little courage, now I am free. I'll do it, if we're anywhere near land."

Then he rose again, and approached the sentry, as if he had forgotten something.

"How far are we from Volo?" he asked, in the English which rippled from his lips so musically.

"I know not," said the man; "but we are supposed to reach there in the morning early. Getting tired of the hold, eh?"

"Yes, I am. I can't endure confinement," said Leoni.

And then, passing over to his corner, he threw himself down again.

"Good, good," he thought. "All works well. I have the night before me. A dozen holes will give this old, overladen ship her hold full before morning, and then, in the confusion, I will seize on anything—a hen-coop, if there's nothing else—and jump overboard."

"Ha, ha!" he chuckled, sardonically; "ha, ha! they think to overreach Leoni, the pirate, but they are wrong!"

During the evening he had to endure another hour of Juanita's company.

It would have been all very pleasant in its way under other circumstances, but the pirate hated having to stifle his feelings so continually, and he wanted, moreover, to be alone with his own thoughts.

But at length she left him, surprised maybe at his manner, but yet wishing him a tender good-night, something which went very much against the grain.

Then Leoni stretched himself down as if to sleep, but in reality in exactly the position in which he could accomplish his diabolical purpose.

No one heard him.

He worked slowly and silently, and gradually as he did so the water began to filter in.

When he had finished, and the water began to pour in, he rose and approached the sentry.

"Can I have something to drink?" he said.

"Ay, I will call out for something," replied the man.

And unsuspectingly he turned his head for a moment.

That moment was quite enough for Leoni; he raised the auger and struck the too confiding soldier a terrific blow on the head.

The man fell as if shot.

Leoni hesitated not a instant, but with a rapid leap sprang up the stair-ladder and reached the deck, to find himself confronted by Jack Gale and Tom Meadows.

Leoni had snatched the bayonet from the musket of the marine, and with this he stood at bay.

"Back! back!" he shouted; "I am a desperate man! Shoot me, ye cowards, if you like, but I will not yield my liberty to any. Let me go. The sea is my native element. Let me pass—let me fling myself into it; but think not to keep me in fetters or in a dungeon. Pietro Leoni, the brigand, monk and pirate, was never born for that."

While he was speaking he was edging his way towards the bulwarks, near which he saw some planking.

His idea was to seize one of these, and leaping into the sea, endeavor to support himself in the water until he could in some fashion reach land.

But Jack was too quick for him.

Springing before the others, he cried, as he raised his sword:

"Leoni, villain! There are no cowards on board this ship. You will not be shot down, though you have broken your word, unless, indeed, you try to leap overboard. What is it you want?"

"Freedom, boy!" cried Leoni.

And he made a sudden spring towards Jack Gale with his bayonet.

In an instant Jack crossed Leoni's weapon with his sword, and a desperate combat began.

Others would have interfered.

But Jack waved them back.

"Leave him to me," he said. "As he refuses to give up his secret, mine is the hand to deal out vengeance. My true sword against his bayonet."

Ben Brace and Tom stood by, gazing anxiously at the combat.

Not that they were anxious about Jack.

They knew him to be a good swordsman.

But they did not like his pitting his life at all against that of such a villain as Leoni.

However, Jack seemed to have the best of it at once in every way.

He wounded the pirate again and again, though not in a vital part; Leoni seemed wondrously agile and skillful in the use of his peculiar weapon.

At length, however, he seemed to give ground, and Jack with a sudden lunge ran him through the shoulder.

Leoni fell back wounded.

As he did so Jack slipped, and Leoni made a spring forwards.

But he meant no attack.

What he did was only a ruse.

He suddenly leaped the other way, and seizing a plank, he jumped overboard into the heaving ocean.

"Lower a boat; he shall not escape!" shouted Jack.

In a few moments a boat was lowered, but it was a useless search.

The pirate was either drowned, or he was diving constantly to avoid capture.

He had escaped or met his fate just as the lights of Volo could be seen through the telescope faintly twinkling in the far distance.

It was just as this happened that the sentry, who had been stunned by the sudden and unexpected blow given to him by the pirate, came hurrying on deck.

"Quick! quick!" he cried; "the ship is filling quickly and sinking fast."

It was true enough.

Leoni's work had been well done, and the sentry who came to tell the news was nearly drenched, through lying in the water as it was washed up from the hold.

A band of a dozen men at once rushed down with lanterns, and one or two volunteered to force their way through the water to find the leak, while others baled vigorously.

Ben Brace was the first to discover the spot.

"I have it," he cried, in a voice which sounded dull and suffocating, as he bent down with his head on a level with the water; "bring me some tar and some rags, or anything. They're auger-holes."

Vigorously Ben worked.

The pirate had done his work neatly, the holes following one another in regular rotation.

So the old salt had no difficulty in finding them, and with the aid of Tom Meadows he was soon rapidly closing them up.

Meanwhile others had descended lower into the hold of the vessel, where they found the water very deep.

All were now working with a will, but the ship was making little progress, but went lumbering along heavily through the water.

Dawn found her still far from Volo at which place she should have arrived at daybreak.

The lookout had seen the lights of the town go out one by one, and had wondered how it was that the *Tormentor* made no way.

Gray dawn spread over the sea, quickly succeeded by a rush of rosy light, and on all sides eyes were strained, and glasses were brought into requisition, to catch some glimpse of the pirate.

But there was not the slightest trace to be seen of him anywhere.

The tide was pouring in toward Volo at great speed.

"Perhaps he has been drifted there before us," said Jack to Ben Brace, as they desisted from their useless search. "The tide is very strong, and we have been making no headway."

"If he's arrived before us, he's a dead un," said the old tar, "that's certain."

It was past noon when the *Tormentor* sailed slowly into the bay at Volo.

As it did so a small crowd was gathered on the shore to the left.

As quickly as they could, Jack, followed by Juanita and others, hurried to the spot to see what it was.

What they had guessed had happened.

Leoni had arrived before them, but he was dead!

Dead, with his secret buried in his evil heart!

But how?

* * * * *

When Ralph Howard found that both Jack Gale and the two girls had slipped through his fingers, there was but one feeling in his heart.

And that was revenge against Leoni.

Against Jack Gale and his friends, even against Lydia, he had no feeling of bitter resentment.

He felt greatly heart-broken, as it were, that he had been deceived; that no persuasives had been able to induce Lydia to consent to become his wife.

But there was no hatred mingled with his sorrow.

Against Jack, he was in a measure angry.

After the spontaneous and effective help which he had afforded to our hero when he was in peril, he felt aggrieved that he had hurried off and, as it were, left him in the lurch.

But Jack in this was really not his own master.

He was bound of course to follow those who had gone to the relief of Colonel Cameron; and consequently was only able to take the briefest of farewells of the pirate.

"Your conduct is hardly generous, Jack Gale," he said, as they parted.

"Why?"

"You leave instantly and make no promise for the future, though I and my men risked our lives for yours this day."

"That is not my fault," returned Jack. "Remember how gladly would I remain in Italy! Think whom I leave behind me! I am forced to do this by the stern command of duty, and in like manner, I am compelled to say to you, adieu, and thank you for your generous aid. We shall meet again!"

They did, but how?

The *Thunder* was longer in getting ready for sea than was expected.

But the delay was of infinite service to Ralph Howard.

In making up his proper complement of men he had to press into his service any who seemed willing to start on a voyage under a daring commander, and ask no questions as to what was his destination or his intentions.

And in doing so, he found that he had taken on board many of the men whom the recent defeat of Leoni had cast adrift.

There was no danger in this.

Leoni had lost caste greatly of late.

His mad and useless pursuit of Lydia had given him no time to carry on legitimately his own calling.

As brigand, monk, and pirate in one, he had signally failed of late.

He had adopted a great deal too much the role of the priest Alfieri.

Quite a week elapsed before the *Thunder* was ready to start on her errand, whatever it might be; and before then Ralph had obtained valuable information from one of his new crew.

He learnt that Lydia and Emily were sent on to Volo.

Towards Volo, then, it was that Ralph Howard directed his ship, and he arrived there on the day previous to that on which Jack and his friends reached it.

He was in luck's way.

There seemed no difficulty at all in learning the situation of the house where Lydia and Emily had been taken; and there he found them.

It was a most strange situation for the two girls.

And yet, if they had known all, they would not as they did have hesitated to see him.

"What are we to do?" said Lydia, when the woman of the house had brought them word as to who their visitor was.

It was a difficult question to answer.

They had (as the dying pirate had told Jack Gale) been taken to the Convent of St. Christopher; but after the battle of St. Antonio they had been given in charge of a friend of Leoni, half pirate, half merchantman, who took them to Volo.

Here they were consigned to the care of a Greek woman who was in the pay of Leoni; and once in her custody they were unable to hold converse with the outer world.

When Ralph Howard came there would have been not the remotest chance of his being allowed to see either of the ladies had it not been that he said that he came from Leoni.

"What are we to do?" said Lydia; "even he is a relief after Leoni. But we have deceived him, and we know not what to expect from him."

Emily flushed.

"It is I who have been most deceitful," she said, "and through me he lost his lieutenant—Norman Rae. Maybe he comes for revenge."

Lydia shrugged her shoulders.

"I begin to care little for his revenge, or in fact, for any one else's," said she. "Let us see what he desires; at any rate, he will be preferable to the other ruffian; he may wish to take us out of the power of Leoni, and that in itself will be a blessing."

"Then we had better see him," said Emily.

"Yes," replied Lydia.

And turning to the Greek woman, she bade her tell Ralph Howard to ascend to the room.

Both women were struck as he entered by the great change in his appearance.

And in his demeanor also.

He seemed more grave and stern; and yet there was an unmistakable sadness in his manner.

He appeared aged and worn, and troubled, as if a great wave of sorrow had overwhelmed all the desperate light-heartedness which was natural to him.

"We meet again then, Mrs. Harden," he said; "but fear not, I am not here in search of you. I am in search of Leoni; I feel that my career is nearly over, and my life will not be complete unless I have rid the world of that man."

What could Lydia say?

It was not womanly to counsel him to a policy of remorseless revenge.

And yet, how could she ask him to abstain from punishing Leoni?

"You will have to await his coming to this island," said Lydia; "he is supposed to be coming back now. We were both seized with severe illness on the road hither; and thanks to that we were relieved from his presence."

Ralph seemed as if he were contending with some great emotion, or struggling with some secret which he was loath to reveal.

At length seating himself near Lydia, he said: "Mrs. Harden, I am going to tell you something which ought to procure me your gratitude."

He noticed the troubled look which came at once into her face, and hastened to add:

"Remember, Mrs. Harden, I said 'gratitude.' All else is gone. I have banished from my mind forever the sweet hope of happiness and reformation. I indulged it too long. I had dreamed of a quiet home, of forgetfulness of the past; for there is not one sin I have committed which is so great as you fancy. I have simply been a reckless, lawless buccaneer, in reckless, lawless times. I have fought for treasure, but I have never murdered in cold blood, as Leoni has done. But of this no more now. I have told you that I hope to earn your gratitude, and on the strength of that I shall ask you a favor."

Lydia glanced at him eagerly.

A wild hope had leaped into her breast.

Could it possibly be true?

"Pray keep me no longer in suspense, Ralph Howard," she said, in a somewhat tremulous voice. "Pray tell me at once."

"My secret, or my request?"

"Both."

"The secret the first," said Ralph. "I will trust for the other to your honor. I warn you the news I bring is of a somewhat exciting nature. So prepare yourself. I have news of your husband."

Lydia caught Emily's hand convulsively, as if for support, and with pale face and anxious eyes, looked eagerly into Ralph's grave countenance.

"Oh, tell me—is he dead?"

"No, Mrs. Harden, he lives, is well, and has gone to England to await you at Portsmouth," replied Ralph, with an effort. "You can find him there on application to the Italian Consul."

For a moment Lydia sat like one stunned or turned to stone.

Then she took his great brown hand and pressed it warmly, while tears welled up into her beautiful eyes.

"You have indeed earned my gratitude," she cried. "Oh, Mr. Howard, tell me what favor it is you desire at my hands that I may grant it at once?"

"It is a great favor," said Ralph, "a favor on which my heart is set, but perhaps even now you will not grant it. I have a son—a boy only seven years of age. He is now at Palermo, in the care of a woman named Barbetta. She lives near the quay, and every one knows her. If you hear of my death, send for him, and bring him up in England. My Ralph will have riches enough to make him able to hold his head up among the wealthiest of the land. When I am dead, open this packet, and there you will find full instructions both as regards Barbetta, and also the position where you will discover the gold I have hoarded up for him."

He handed her as he spoke a packet neatly done up with red silk cord, which she took, and at once placed in her pocket.

This action was enough to prove that she saw no difficulty in acquiescing in the arrangement he proposed.

"You will aid me in this?" he cried, in eager inquiry.

"Yes."

"Thank you! May Heaven reward you!" cried the pirate, who for many a long year had not mentioned the name of Heaven, except in connection with an oath.

And seizing her hand, he pressed it again and again to his lips.

"But why do you ask this now?" asked Emily.

"You are well, and strong, and rich. Why not quit the life you vowed once to forswear, and retire to England with your child?"

"Do not speak of that again," said Howard.

"The die is cast. Let us not attempt to bring back thoughts which would only madden. Once for all, Signora Emily, it was for your sister's sake I was going to forswear the life of a pirate. But she is lost to me forever. Her husband lives; I myself bring to her the news that it is so. To me, therefore, nothing is left, save the old life; the roar of the sea; the tossing of the tempestuous waves; the clash of swords; the thunder of artillery."

"Think not of it now," said Lydia. "Be persuaded by me, and come to England."

The pirate shook his head with a sad smile.

"No, no; pray do not speak of that again," said he. "That is all now a thing of the past. I want your word that you will care for my little Ralph; that you will prevent his knowing that his father was a pirate; that he will be brought up a gentleman."

"I promise all this," said Lydia. "But why now?"

"Because I intend waiting here until there is a chance of meeting Leoni. Then one must fall—who knows which?"

The pirate smiled as he said this, but there was no merriment in the smile.

"You do not object to the charge, then?" he added.

"No; I accept it willingly," replied Lydia. "But you look pale and anxious. Will you accept a glass of wine?"

The pirate's eyes sparkled.

Not at the prospect of drink.

It was the thought of the feelings which would arise in his heart as he quaffed the rich red wine.

"Yes, I will," he replied.

Emily brought from the sideboard a decanter of wine, and poured out a large glass.

"I drink to the health," he cried—"the health of Ernest Harden, and may health and happiness attend him and those belonging to him as long as they behave well to my boy."

Soon after he left.

"What a strange man," said Emily. "He seems thoroughly to have made up his mind that he is going to die."

"That is only a morbid feeling, and will pass away," returned Lydia. "A few weeks more, and we shall hear of him once more as the terror of the Mediterranean. But I cannot spare time to think of him now. Fancy, Emily, Ernest is alive, and waiting for me."

"It is indeed good news," said Emily. "The beginning, perhaps, of a happy end. But yet, of what avail is it to us, when we cannot leave this island?"

"Cannot we ask Ralph Howard to rescue us?" said Lydia. "He came voluntarily to tell me of the safety of my husband, and to beg that I would care for his child. Surely we can trust him now?"

"Do you think it safe to trust him, when the old temptation will be upon him? He loves you, you know that well, and once more in his hands, how can you tell that you will not be borne away again to some island where you will be utterly in his power?"

"I did not think of that," said Lydia; "but I do not believe that he would act so treacherously. No, no; there was truth in his face when he spoke to me about his boy. When he comes again I will ask him."

She little dreamed what their next meeting would be like.

Ralph meanwhile strolled away, and passing into many a little wine shop in his journey, made inquiries about Leoni.

But no one appeared to know anything about him, except, of course, by reputation.

Both his visit and his connection with Volo had been kept a profound secret.

That evening he again visited Lydia, and was asked about taking them to England.

"When I have met Leoni—yes," he answered.

"Until then, no—unless, indeed, he is dead. If the latter, well and good, as soon as I get the news. But before I do hear it, or I meet him here, I can aid you in no way. I must remain here and bide my time. It is now for the last time my life against his."

Neither Lydia nor Emily saw that a deep resolution of revenge was in his heart, and that it would be utterly useless to endeavor to shake it.

"You will protect us, at any rate, from Leoni?" said Emily.

"Yes, with my life."

Even he could never have dreamed of the manner in which he would again meet his rival and deadly foe.

He knew pretty well all the perils of the deep, but that Leoni should come ashore wounded, exhausted, and clinging to a plank, was not a thing he could have imagined.

However, on the day after his interview with Lydia and her sister, he was one of the many who saw Leoni land, after his desperate struggle with the waves since he leaped from the deck of the *Tormentor*.

He was the first to raise him up.

"At last we meet Leoni," he said in Italian, "with none to interrupt us."

Leoni could make no reply.

He was utterly exhausted.

Ralph could have had now whatever revenge he chose.

But he scorned to take it.

He was not one to take a paltry advantage of any one, under such circumstances.

His vengeance would have been nothing if it

could not be taken sword to sword, and face to face.

He led him to a wine shop, on the edge of the high cliff, gave him wine, and left him to rest there for the night, keeping a watch on his actions.

By the aid of some of his sailors in the morning he took him to a smooth turf-covered spot close by the edge of the high rocks that towered over the beach.

"Now, Leoni," said Ralph Howard, after the Italian had recovered his strength, "I have given you wine to stimulate you. Rest awhile even now if you choose; but I have sworn that this meeting shall be our last. Here is a sword—have mine—choose whichever suits you. But fight you must, and to the death."

Leoni laughed scornfully.

"My swim, and my wine, and my night's rest," said he, "have made me as bold and as strong as the lion whose name I bear. So fear not that I shall refuse to meet you in deadly combat."

He took eagerly the sword offered him.

"Now, Howard, I am ready for you," he cried, and placed himself at once in position.

Howard waited until his enemy was quite ready, and then in a skillful manner began to rain in upon him.

Leoni seemed to have entirely recovered from his wounds; or else his rage and the copious draughts of wine he had imbibed had taken away their effects.

The battle was witnessed by no one near at hand.

Ralph Howard had forbidden his men to interfere, consequently they only lingered down below on the beach.

It was a perilous spot they had chosen.

Right on the edge of the cliff that went down sheer so many hundred feet to the shingly beach. But neither thought of danger.

The two pirates were only eager to take each other's life.

The first calm passes made, their blood rose.

Their swords whirled and writhed about like living things, and wounds were rapidly given and received.

At length Howard's gigantic stature began to tell in his favor; and Leoni was gradually driven to the edge of the rocky ledge.

All ideas of chivalry were driven out of the mind of Ralph Howard now.

He knew only that he was face to face with his enemy; and that he had sworn a deadly revenge.

So nearer and nearer to the cliff's edge went Leoni, backwards, towards a spot where a clump of dark-looking firs straggled their rugged roots over the margin.

Here at length Leoni arrived—beaten back by

the mighty arm of the pirate; and at length slipping, he caught hold of a branch and found himself half swinging over the terrible abyss.

The English pirate laughed loudly as he paused for awhile.

"Now, Leoni," he cried, "you, who have sworn never to yield to mortal foe, yield to me as my slave, or die the death."

"To you! to you of all other men!" shouted Leoni scornfully. "Never! welcome death sooner. I live only for revenge, and that will come sooner than you expect."

He saw what Ralph Howard did not see, and that was that the ground all round the roots of the dark old pine was cracking visibly.

"Then take your death, villain, assassin, betrayer!" shouted Ralph, and with a smile like that of the arch-demon, he sprang forward.

Leoni knew now that in any case death awaited him.

And he was resolved that he would not die alone.

So as Ralph approached him with upraised sword, he gave a great wrench at the branch of the tree, as he parried his enemy's stroke with the other.

Ralph, desperate and full of eager vengeance, struck at him furiously.

As he did so, he felt the earth give way beneath him, and by a natural instinct which had in it nothing of cowardice, he clutched at the same branch as that which Leoni held, and in an instant it broke.

There was one united, muttered hoarse cry from the throats of the two men.

Down, down they crashed, and then their voices were still forever.

Together they went to their doom—Ralph the Avenger, the giant buccaneer; the terror of the Mediterranean—and Leoni, brigand, priest, and pirate.

It was the crowd gathered round these two bodies which attracted the notice of Jack and his friends as they landed.

"They are both dead," cried our hero, as he looked at their mangled forms and pale stern faces, "and we shall never learn where he has placed my friends."

But at the moment that our hero had given up all for lost, Juanita sprang forward with a glad cry towards a man who was standing looking on with folded arms, gazing at the fisher-folk, who were raising the bodies of the dead pirates for conveyance to the town.

She had recognized at once the face of one of the pirates who had served under Leoni (and who since had joined company with Ralph), and seizing him by the arm, she looked up into his face.

"Ah, Paolo!" she said, "do you know me? I

am Juanita. Leoni, who lies yonder dead, holds you no longer in thrall, Paolo, neither does your new master, and if you will tell this English officer where he has hidden away the two English ladies, you will be handsomely rewarded."

The man did not think twice.

He knew, from having waited outside the Greek woman's house where Howard had visited, the place where the two girls were located.

Being introduced to Jack, he quickly took him to the spot, where upon hearing of the death of both their mutual enemies, the girls accorded them such a reception as they little expected.

Now that all uncertainty as regarded Ernest Harden was gone, there was nothing to mar the bliss of the reunion.

Fortune greatly favored Jack.

An English vessel, homeward bound, came into harbor the next day, and, under the circumstances, the captain of the *Tormentor* begged Jack to accept leave of absence, and without further delay he went home with the two girls to Portsmouth, where Ernest Harden was awaiting every vessel anxiously.

We will not pause now to describe the meeting between husband and wife, or the welcome which all received at the "old home."

We have to do with their future fortune in our sequel.

Suffice it that Ben Brace and Tom Meadows found Lucy Trimmings and Dora Daly in the place appointed, and a twelvemonth after Jack, having served another campaign, came into a fortune through the death of an uncle.

He hastened home at once, bringing with him his old friends, and there was a triple wedding at Melton Church.

Emily and her brave young husband, Jack Gale, settled in a house near the latter's father, Ben Brace and Lucy bought the village inn, and Tom and Dora purchased a farm.

Juanita returned to Italy, after bidding a sad farewell to her English friends, never dreaming under what strange circumstances they would meet again.

Lydia was true to her trust.

She and Ernest brought the little Ralph, the pirate's son, to England, though in some unaccountable manner they lost the packet containing the secret of his wealth.

But this did not matter to them.

They honorably treated him as their own, little dreaming what a strange fortune this lost packet was holding out to them in the future.

And so for awhile we leave them, until we take up the thread of our sequel—a story of more thrilling adventures still, when Young Jack and Young Tom set out, as their fathers had done before them, to carve their way to fame and to Search for the Pirate's Gold.

[THE END.]

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